

2dartist¹¹⁴

Issue 114 | June 2015

plus

- 10 of the best digital images
- **Narrative fantasy sketches**
 - Craft an air vehicle
 - and much more!

CREATE A SCENE OF EPIC PROPORTIONS

Juan Pablo Roldan shares invaluable techniques for creating a large scale sci-fi scene

Editor's Letter



JESS SERJENT-TIPPING
Deputy Editor

2dartist is now on Facebook!

Welcome to 2dartist issue 114!

We've got an exciting mix of sci-fi and fantasy for you this month! Issue 114 brings you an insightful interview with illustrator and concept artist, Brun Croes filled with invaluable advice. Brun Croes also pops up in our tutorial section as he demonstrates how to develop a scene using sketching techniques.

Our tutorials also cover creating a grungy sci-fi scene of epic proportions, crafting an air vehicle, and using matte painting techniques to alter an environment's atmosphere – or if you're in the mood for some fantasy characters, you can learn how José Parodi painted *Dragon Hunter*, or take a peek into the sketchbook of Nick Harris. Enjoy!

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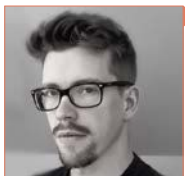
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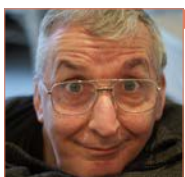
BRUN CROES

Brun Croes is a freelance illustrator working in the animation, games and entertainment industry. He's been active as a professional for four years focusing mainly on visual development.



JESSICA ROSSIER

Originally from Switzerland, Jessica Rossier is based in France. She mostly works for films, videogames, or advertising companies by providing high-quality visual assets, as a concept artist and matte painter.



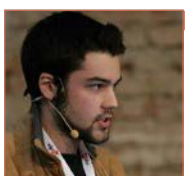
NICK HARRIS

Nick Harris is a UK-based illustrator, who has been working as a full-time freelancer since 1982 - mostly in children's publishing. He shares his traditional and digital sketches.



JOSÉ PARODI

Jose Parodi is a Columbian artist who produces art for children's educational books and literary works. He saw how important discipline was to artistic development and uses sport to aid him with this.



EFFLAM MERCIER

Efflam Mercier is a freelance concept artist and consultant, working for VFX and videogame companies; he enjoys experimenting with different processes and loves lighting.



RASMUS BERGGREN

Rasmus Berggren creates universes for clients for film, games and toys, and aims to deliver the highest possible quality and originality with his visual development studio, MOOD.



JUAN PABLO ROLDAN

Juan is a concept artist for videogames, films and TV companies. He focuses on the visual development of pitches for TV series, movies, short films and innovative entertainment technology.



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We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: jess@3dtotal.com.

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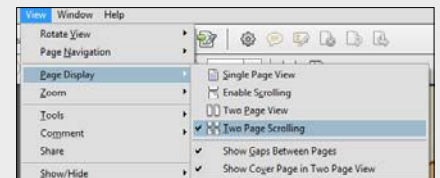
If you're having problems viewing the double-page spreads that we feature within this magazine, then follow this handy little guide on how to set up your PDF reader!

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Jump to articles

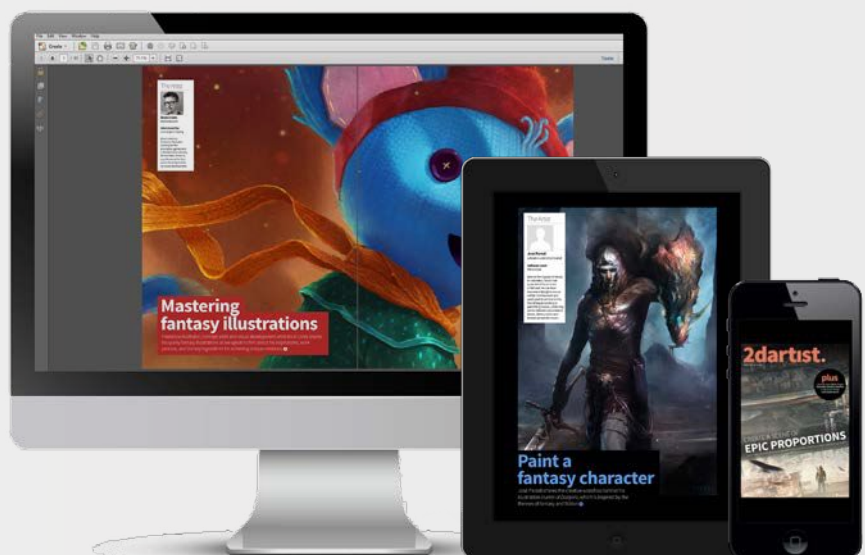
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The Artist



Brun Croes

bruncroes.com

Interviewed by:

Jess Serjent-Tipping

Brun Croes is a freelance illustrator working for the animation, games and entertainment industry. He has been active as a professional for four years, focusing mainly on visual development.

Mastering fantasy illustrations

Freelance illustrator, concept artist and visual development artist Brun Croes shares his quirky fantasy illustrations as we speak to him about his inspirations, work process, and the key ingredients for achieving unique creations ▶



Brun Croes is a freelance illustrator, concept artist and visual development artist from Antwerp. Brun knew from an early age that he wanted to pursue a career in the arts, saying “The idea of drawing and designing all day naturally got me very excited.” Brun has a talent for creating fascinating imagery from his imagination, and captures atmosphere and moods on the border of fantasy and reality.

We chat to Brun about how he manages to capture these imaginary worlds, his inspirations and how he spends his time when he isn't creating awesome illustrations.

2dartist: Hello Brun, thank you for speaking to 2dartist! Can you begin by telling us a little about yourself and your career?

Brun Croes: Hello! Thanks for having me. I'm Brun Croes, and I work as a freelance illustrator, concept artist and visual development artist from my hometown Antwerp. Early on in my life I discovered I had a fondness for all things visual and audio-visual. I get a kick out of making up imaginary worlds and rendering them out from sketch to finished illustration. When I was younger my dad told me one day that I could draw for a living. The idea of drawing and designing all day naturally got me very excited, so a good decade and a half later I'm proud to say that I've been successfully freelancing for almost four years now.

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any artists that you try to reference in your work?

BC: A few years ago when I was just starting to understand how to draw, I was mainly inspired by other artist who I found out about on websites such as conceptart.org, cghub.com, and blogs. The people on those forums where a big inspiration and kept each other going.

Then with the rise of Facebook there were a lot of new faces, and with them a bunch of great new inspirations, but often also an overload of too much awesome stuff which sometimes made me feel bad about my own art.

● This was made for a show at Gallery Nucleus. It's made with graphite pencil and watercolors © Brun Croes



Nowadays I tend to search for inspiration in a variety of places; on holidays, with friends, visiting old cultures, long walks, and so on. But to name just a few artists that have always inspired me, not by any means in any particular order, I've always loved the work of people such as The Black Frog, Michael

Kutsche, Moby Frank, Vitaliy Shusko and Helen Chen. They are amazing artists.

2da: What is your favorite subject matter to work with? What makes a project really fun and interesting for you? ►

🕒 Artist Timeline Brun's career so far

1987: Hello, world!

1988: Brun decided he wanted to do art for a living when he was just one year old

2011: Graduated with a Masters degree in illustration

2012: Started doing his first group gallery show in galleries such as Nucleus and Light Grey Art Lab

2012: Had his first real assignment as an illustrator for Tokkun Studios

2013: Became a full-time freelancer as jobs started to become steadier

2013: Started doing solo gallery shows

2013: Published his first picture book

2013: First introduction to background painting for animation, and completely fell in love with it

2014–2015: Continued to do visual development and backgrounds for animations with studios such as The Neuland, Tokkun and the Belgium VAF for a variety of animations

2016: Zombie apocalypse...



- A map Brun created to navigate a website. The final image was also animated in subtle ways to give it a bit more life © Van In and Brun Croes





- One of the illustrations done for the children's book *Kas*, where the main character is sleeping by the window © Abimo and Brun Croes



BC: I have to say it depends a bit. I used to be really into drawing darkly lit images and Tim Burton-style scenes and atmospheres; I could get lost in drawing crooked trees, strange rocks and weird looking people with strange clothes.

However, nowadays it's less about the subject matter and more about the challenge. I find a project

interesting when I feel like I'm learning something, and I have to push myself to strive further.

It's an amazing feeling to start a project and feel completely overwhelmed; I love to feel like the challenge ahead is a boss fight that I need to win in order to improve my skills. I love to look back at a project once it's done and being able to say: I made

that thing my own and now I can add it to my library of skills and become a better artist. So it's about the challenge for me. Doing the thing that you're good at over and over again can get boring really quick.

2da: What is your typical approach to painting digitally? Do you have any favorite brushes you find yourself using regularly?



BC: Whether I work digitally or traditionally, I always tend to start with a series of thumbnails. I tend to use these small thumb-sized sketches to figure out how big shapes can form a composition that's easy on the viewer's eye, and helps to translate the story behind it in a good way. After that, I block out my shapes in silhouettes on different layers – most of the time organized by front, mid and background.

Once my shapes are defined and cleaned up, I start working with Masks, Clipping Masks and Alpha channels to color them in. Sometimes I do this in grayscale, at other times I'll start in color right away. Near the end of the image, I'll make a few effects layers, mainly adjustment layers and some fancy camera lens tricks and particles. I have quite a big collection of brushes, but I tend to stick to two or

three most of the time, being a Chalk brush, Hard Round brush and a Soft Round brush. With the occasional custom brush when need be.

2da: You also work in traditional mediums often. How would you say your process differs or do you transfer the techniques across? Do you favor one over the other? ►

● The first illustration made for Kas © Abimo and Brun Croes



● This is part of a series of background illustrations for an interactive website. They were looking for realistic colors, but wanted to keep the shape language really simple © Van In and Brun Croes



BC: I think I prefer digital painting, but to be honest it's like choosing between two children. I do tend to paint more digitally, mainly because of work.

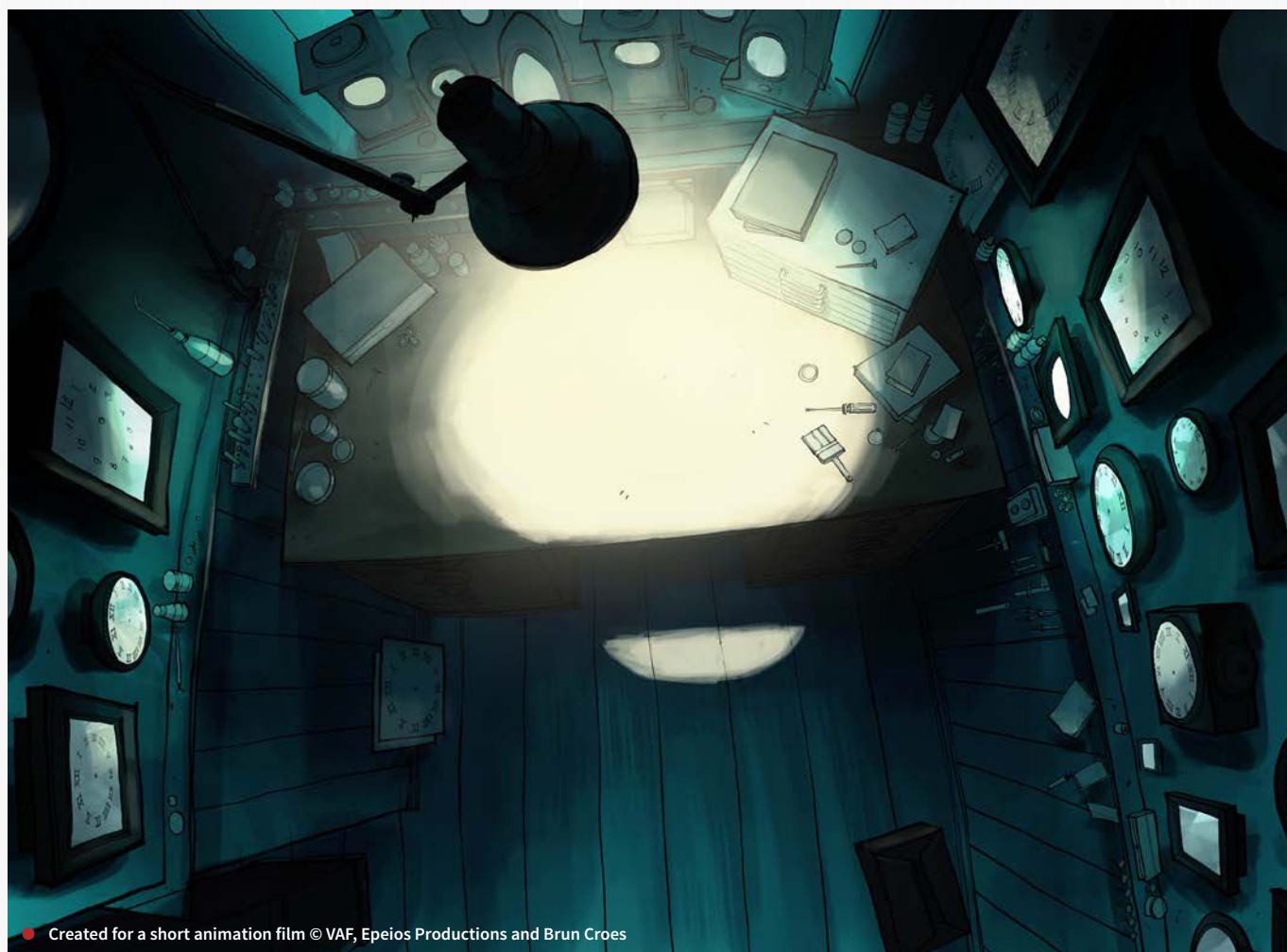
When I'm working digitally though, I work a lot more chaotic then I do when working traditionally.

Photoshop gives me the opportunity to experiment a lot without having to start over again. When working traditionally, I tend to have the final image in my head before finishing it – it's more a routine of going from sketch, to final water-colored painting, step-by-step, really carefully. I find it absolutely relaxing to

get lost in that process of adding layers and layers of extra touches.

I do find that my digital work and traditional work look quite a bit different from one another, and would love to combine the two more. However I do ►







● Created for a short animation film © VAF, Epeios Productions and Brun Croes

like to scan my pencil drawings into Photoshop to give them some color there as a test before coloring the actual pencil drawing with real paint. This way I can try out some colors that work in Photoshop and afterwards paint them in with real watercolor on the actual pencil drawing.

2da: Which project (personal or professional) are you the proudest to have worked on, and why?

BC: Ooh this is a difficult one. Most of the projects that I'm really proud of are still clouded in a shroud of secrecy. NDA's (non-disclosure agreements) prevent me from talking about them. Let's just say that there are quite a few audio-visual projects that I'm really proud to have been a small part of.

I've had the opportunity to work with so many talented people from studios such as The Neuland and Tokkun – the projects I did for them were a lot of fun, and I hope to be able to show something from them soon.

I tend to take every project to heart, after all, my job is my passion and that's something that is very personal to deal with. I like to see every project as a milestone towards getting better at understanding my craft.

⚡ PRO TIPS

Surround yourself with other artists

Surround yourself with like-minded people; find those who are interested in perusing the same goals as you do. Together you'll find that you can reach your goals much faster and it gives a real motivation boost. A lot of my current job connections started out as friendships and have helped me to put a foot down in the industry.

Don't look too much at others

Don't look too much at what other people are doing, everyone has their own path and will find their own way to success, whatever 'success' might be to you. Keep focusing on your own work and try to do your own thing.

Focus on your art, but don't forget the business side

Focus on your art, your basics; try to invest as much time as you can in getting to know the fundamentals of drawings. I'm talking light, composition, shape, form language, colors and how they affect the scene, anatomy, and so on. But don't forget that if you want a good career you're going to need to have a little bit of a business mind as well. Get versed in how to talk with your clients and how to deal with the less 'artistic' sides of the job.

2da: You have a distinct style which is very recognizable, how did you develop this signature style? Was it a conscious choice?

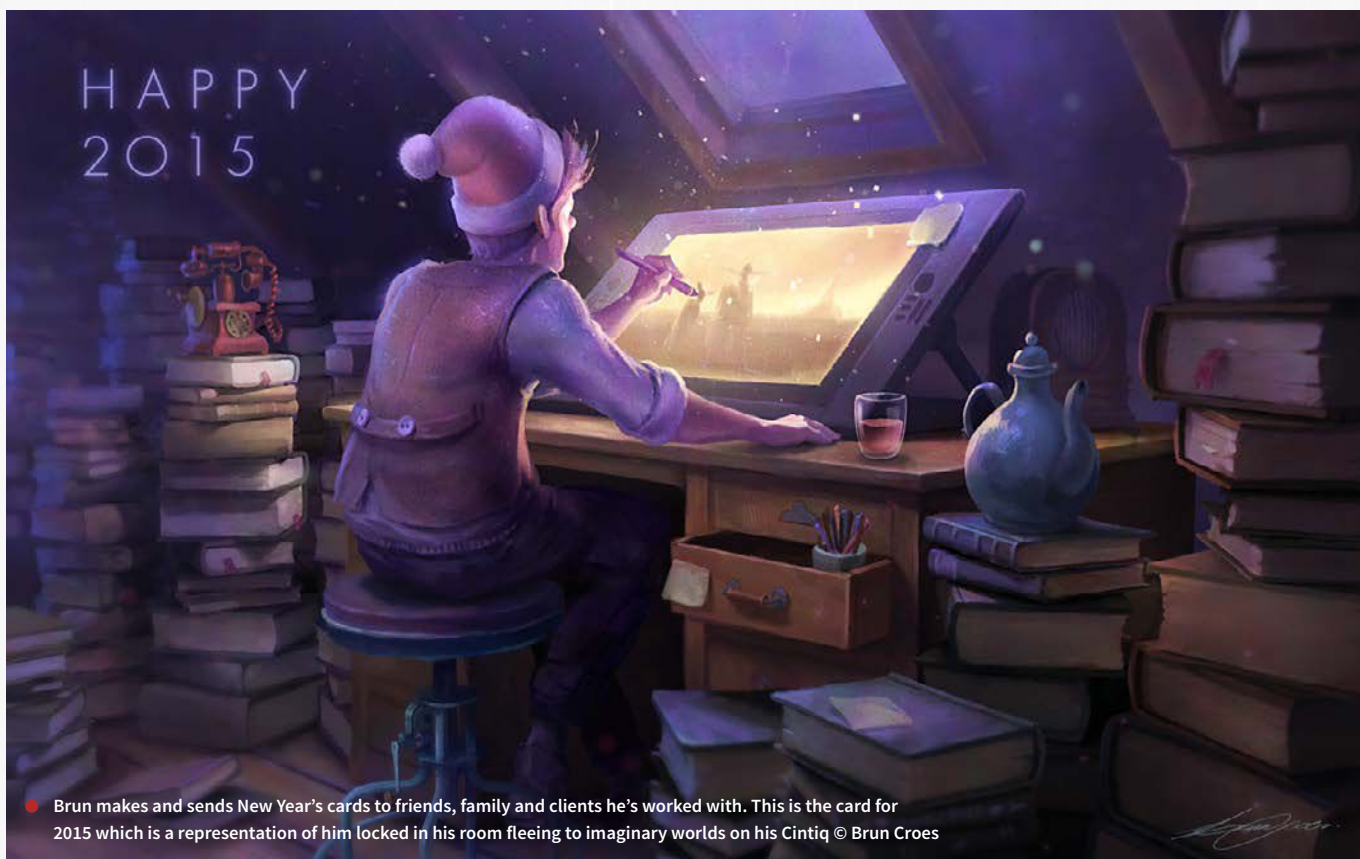
BC: Thank you! It's a funny thing, style... When I just started out I was always thinking about what my

style should be and how I should shape it.

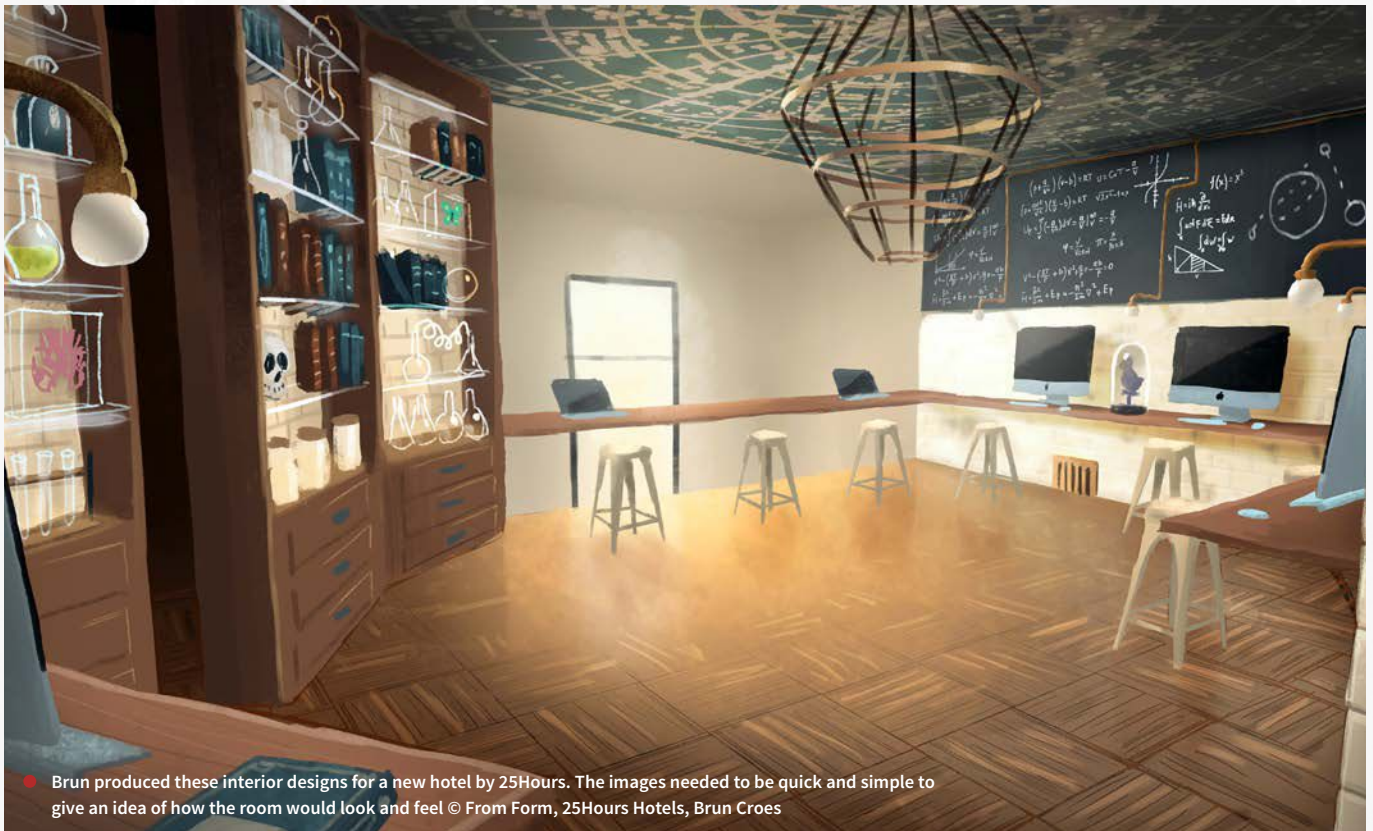
I was always so amazed by other artists who seemed to have no problem finding their unique style.

It took me quite a while, but I came to the conclusion that style is something that finds you rather than you finding or searching for a style. It's in your hands the ►

- A quick exploration sketch for a character design which was to be used in a small animation project © Van In and Brun Croes



- Brun makes and sends New Year's cards to friends, family and clients he's worked with. This is the card for 2015 which is a representation of him locked in his room fleeing to imaginary worlds on his Cintiq © Brun Croes



● Brun produced these interior designs for a new hotel by 25Hours. The images needed to be quick and simple to give an idea of how the room would look and feel © From Form, 25Hours Hotels, Brun Croes

“Focus on problem solving, learn why your images look good or why they are failing. Keep at it and accept failure as a stepping stone to becoming better”

moment you are born. It's determined by so many small things, the way you hold your pen, the way you look at the world, the way you see colors, what kinds of shapes you like, which cultures inspire you, the music you listen to, and so on.

So to answer your question, it just came to me when I wasn't looking for it. Searching or forcing a style seemed to keep me away from finding my own style. That's not to say that I don't think about it anymore, but in the end I feel like it comes naturally and that it will keep on evolving as my life continues its course.

2da: How do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?

BC: When I find some free time, which really isn't that often, I like to go out with friends, energizing by walking in old woods or finally getting lost in that game you've bought on day one of its release, but never got around to play because at the end of the day you're a bit tired of looking too much at a screen.

I also spend a lot of evenings making music with a bunch of talented musicians, which is always a fresh get away from drawing all day.

2da: What techniques, tools, or skills are you planning to work on next?

BC: I'm fairly satisfied with the tools I use now (which are almost limited to Photoshop, graphite pencils and water colors) but I would love to get more into pen and ink drawings. I'm always so amazed when I see black-and-white ink drawings.

Lately I find myself going back to a lot of the basics. I have a good understanding of things such as lighting, form, composition, and anatomy, but I feel like all of them could be improved upon.

I think I might have skipped a few steps when I was learning about them that keep me from truly mastering them. So right now I'm focusing on those things, especially light and how it affects materials. After that I'll probably focus again on anatomy soon, got to get better!

2da: If you could offer a key piece of advice to aspiring concept artists and illustrators, what would it be?

BC: Keep on drawing until your hands fall off. I know a lot of people who love to draw and would love to do it professionally, but they just don't seem to realize that being able to draw pretty pictures isn't what's going to make you a good professional.

You need to understand your craft, you have to be able to work on command, not only when you feel

like you have a creative buzz going. So focus on problem solving, learn why your images look good or why they are failing. Keep at it and accept failure as a stepping stone to becoming better. Realize that you are doing something that originated from a passion, so naturally you're going to care about what you do, and you'll find yourself in ups and downs because of it.

Don't look too much at other people's work and successes, but focus on doing your own stuff and finding your own way. That 17-year-old kid that draws amazing and seems light-years ahead of you? Don't let that hold you back, keep on doing your thing and search for your market.

Find other people that enjoy drawing and share your skills and knowledge, sharing is so much better than jealously holding on to what you know. Learn from each other and go forth a richer person.

2da: Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

BC: For now all I can say is to keep an eye on my website and social media sites. I plan to do a few big updates in one in the coming months that should reveal a bit of the stuff I've been working on, and I'm really looking forward to sharing it! ●

Thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule to take part in our interview! We really appreciate it.

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NICK HARRIS

Sketchbook

Nick Harris's sketches are full of texture and movement as he captures the expressions of his characters. We take a look through his collection of traditional and digital sketches

The Artist



Nick Harris
nickillus.com

Nick Harris is a UK-based illustrator, who has been working as a full-time freelancer since 1982 – mostly in children's publishing.

Take a look at Nick Harris's playful sketches...

It's hard to say whether I went into children's publishing because my style naturally fits there, or if I adapted my style to suit. A bit of both, probably. However, a big factor for me being there is the pursuit of the freedom to draw from my imagination, rather than be dictated by the limits of available, visual reference material.

That is not to say that you don't have to observe the real world. How can you draw a Sopwith Camel Bi-plane if you've never seen one? The key is in trying to understand the form. Then you can kind of construct a 2D facsimile on the canvas at whatever angle you may need.

For me, sketching is all about fumbling around and getting it wrong until you get it right – or at least less wrong. The right lines are all there waiting to be discovered. Your job is to find them. Each person's 'right lines' are different, because we all have individual sensibilities.

Sketching has changed slightly for me since going completely digital. In real media, I sketch loosely on paper or a pad before taking the rough idea onto an illustration board where I tackle a detailed freehand drawing – no squaring up or tracing unless I hit problems. In digital, the loose sketch is gradually tightened up in the same file – and the canvas dimensions are often changed as I decide on a composition as I go. It's all very fluid, to try and keep the image alive.

Inspiration and ideas

I grew up loving mythologies like *King Arthur* and *LOTR*, as well as things such as *Gormenghast* and *His Dark Materials*. Those tales led me to artists like Arthur Rackham, Alan Lee, Brian Froud, and J.B. Monge.

These days, I also love the work of Norman Rockwell and James Gurney. Their working methods are completely different to mine but I adore the results. There are just too many wonderful artists to name, all who blow my socks off. I also love films and animations that tell a good story; narrative is all important.

Materials

Fine line pencils (0.3mm or 0.5mm with F or HB grade lead) and pens (like Rotring – again 0.3mm and 0.5mm mostly) on standard cartridge paper or smoother (hot pressed) watercolor equivalents



best suit my fumbling construction process in real media. However, my most-used piece of equipment is a soft eraser, as I get it wrong a lot before I get near what I'm looking for. Biro's are also wonderful for sketching.

Digitally, I prefer ArtRage and Sketchbook Pro with my Wacom Intuos. ArtRage offers paper textures, a nice watercolor for tonal washes (on layers set to Multiply blend mode), and chalk that introduces a natural media feel. Sketchbook is a joy to use with its fluid response and easy-to-make custom brushes allowing the introduction of tone with texture.

Sketching techniques

Most of my work is character driven, so I usually start with the figure or group that forms the focus. I only thumbnail if I don't already have a vague idea to start with. Working digitally, I'll just

sketch at screen size until the composition needs working out at correct dimensions. I mark in the big forms first at this stage to place the shapes.

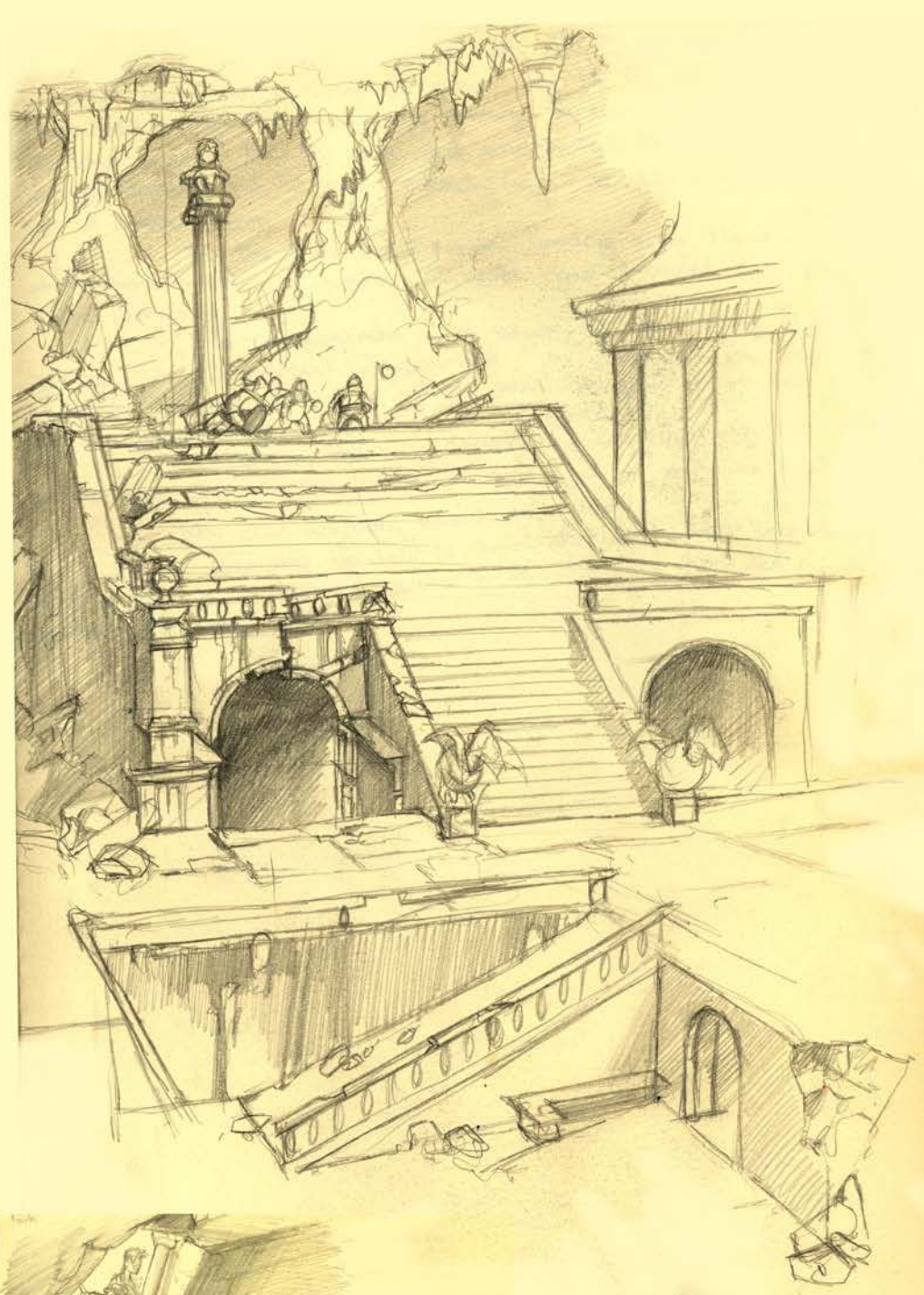
Figures tend to start naked to ensure the anatomy works before I clothe them later. I have any number of anatomy books for reference, but am not a slave to them. ●

01 One of the various sketches done to help immerse myself in a comedy/horror frame of mind for the aforementioned project. Pencil and Rotring pen on paper.

02 An early sketch from an old personal project idea, now so long on the back burner it's all but gone out. Set almost entirely underground, it encouraged a lot of scribbling to build up tone. Pencil on paper.



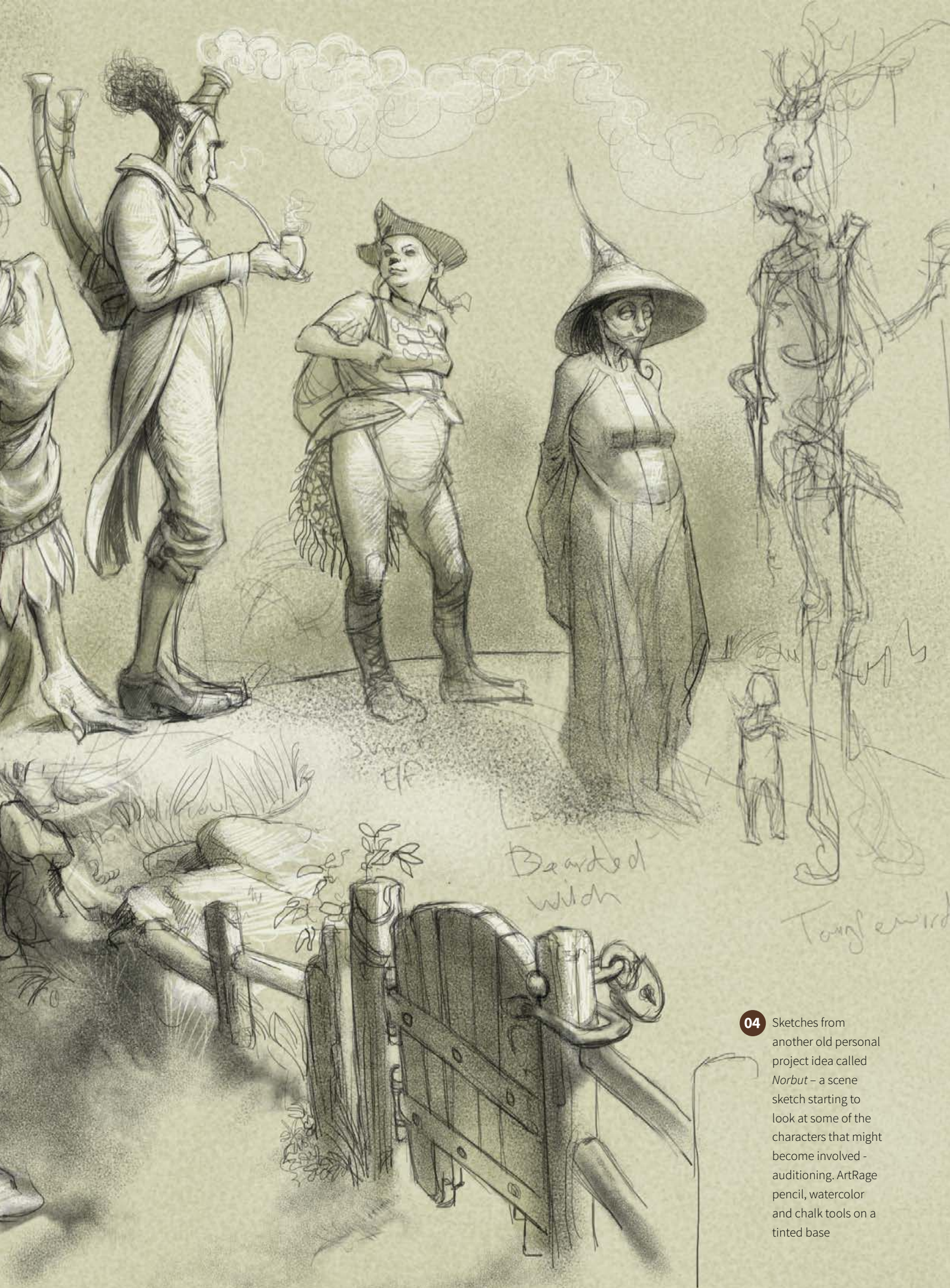






Fret Demons

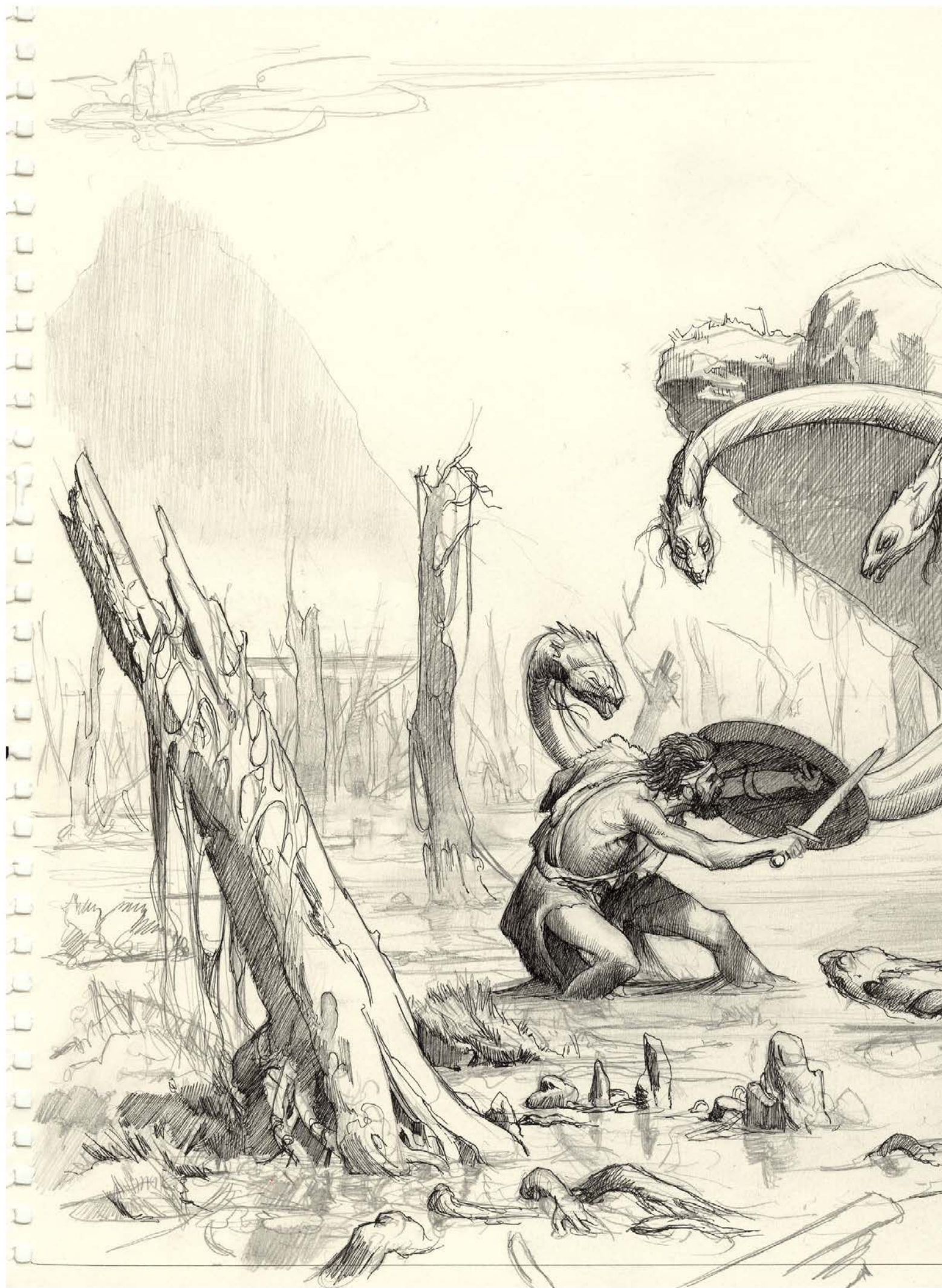
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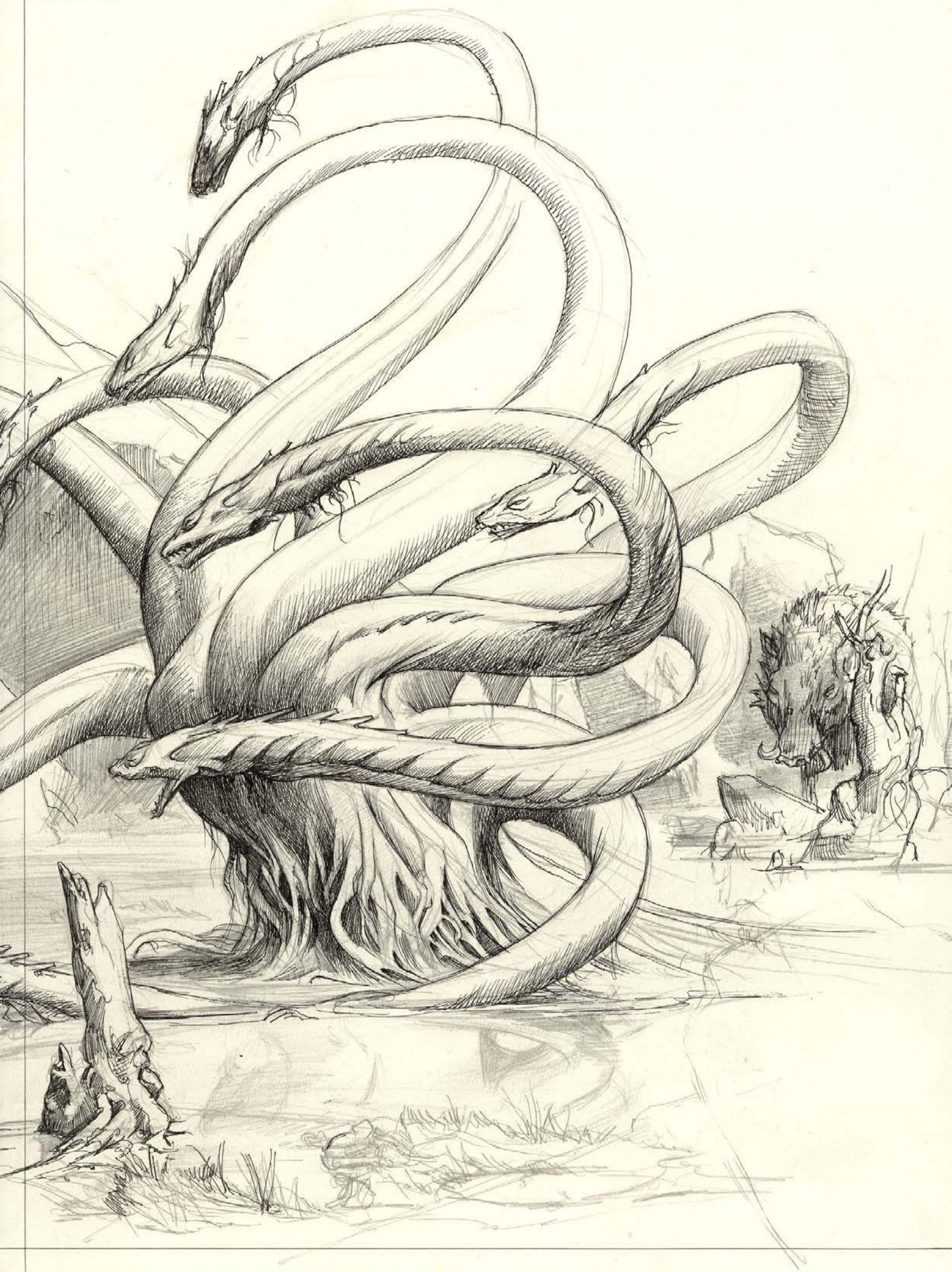


04 Sketches from another old personal project idea called *Norbut* – a scene sketch starting to look at some of the characters that might become involved - auditioning. ArtRage pencil, watercolor and chalk tools on a tinted base









2dartist

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and their artwork to adorn the pages of our
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Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



Firefly Valley

Hernan Flores

Year created: 2015

Web: hernan.artstation.com

Submit your images! Simply email jess@3dtotal.com





Uninvited Guest

Aritra Dey

Year created: 2015

Web: artstation.com/artist/aritra_89





Street Repair

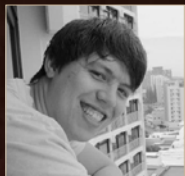
Julien Gauthier

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Haul - Buried Statue

Lloyd Allan

Year created: 2015

Web: facebook.com/LloydAllanART

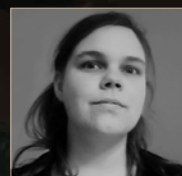
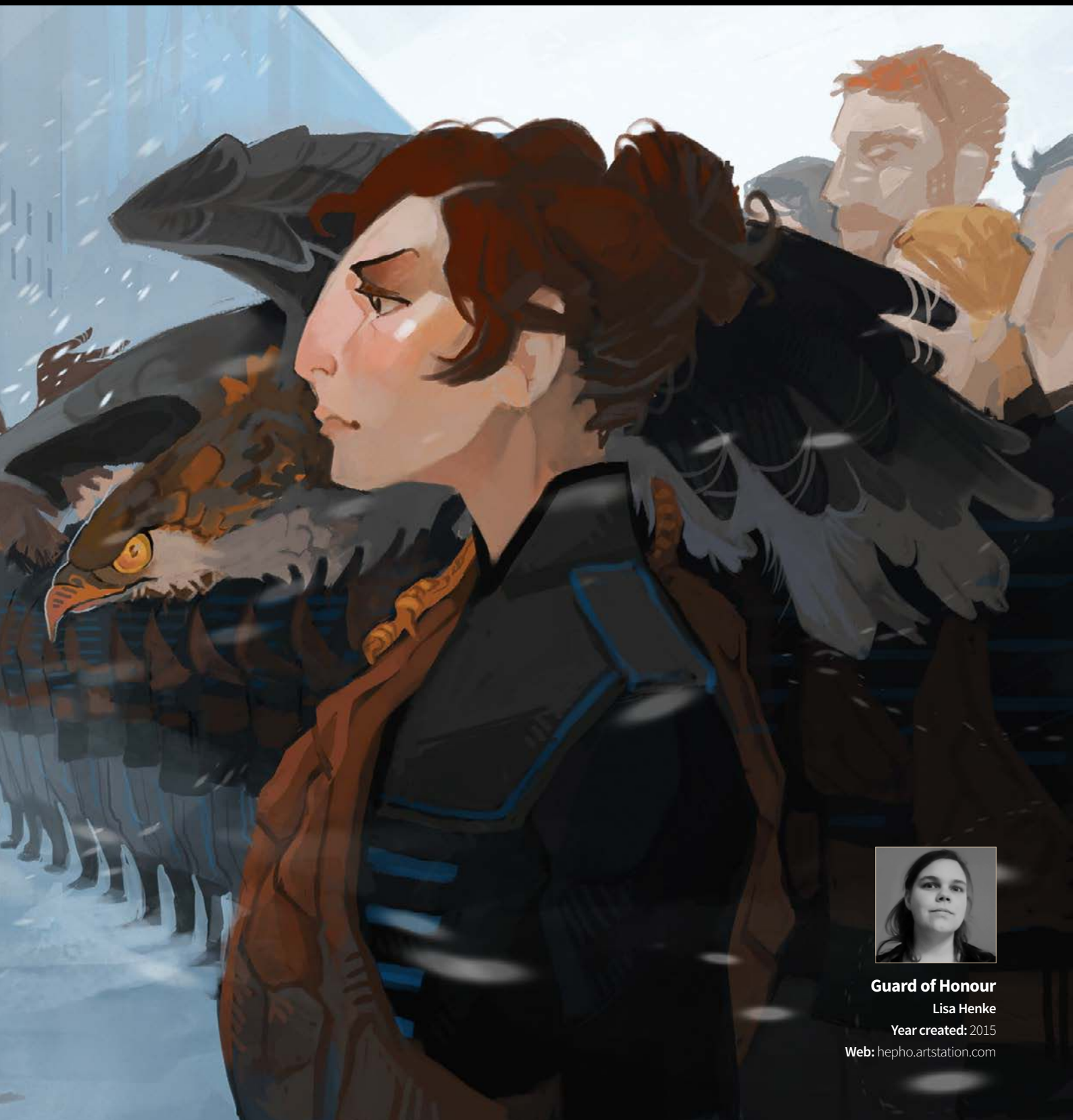
© Lloyd Allan





LLOYD ALLAN





Guard of Honour

Lisa Henke

Year created: 2015

Web: hepho.artstation.com



Supertree city

Swat3d - Sviatoslav Gerasimchuk

Year created: 2015

Web: swat3d.artstation.com

© Sviatoslav Gerasimchuk (image created for
Walter Maduro for future title *Elisar*)





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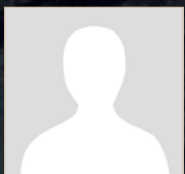
The Tribe

Jakob Eirich

Year created: 2015

Web: jakobeirich.de





Life of a Pirate

Aritra Dey

Year created: 2015

Web: artstation.com/artist/aritra_89

aritra.dey89@gmail.com





Dirty30 #7

Ken Fairclough

Year created: 2015

Web: kenfairclough.blogspot.com





Old Architecture

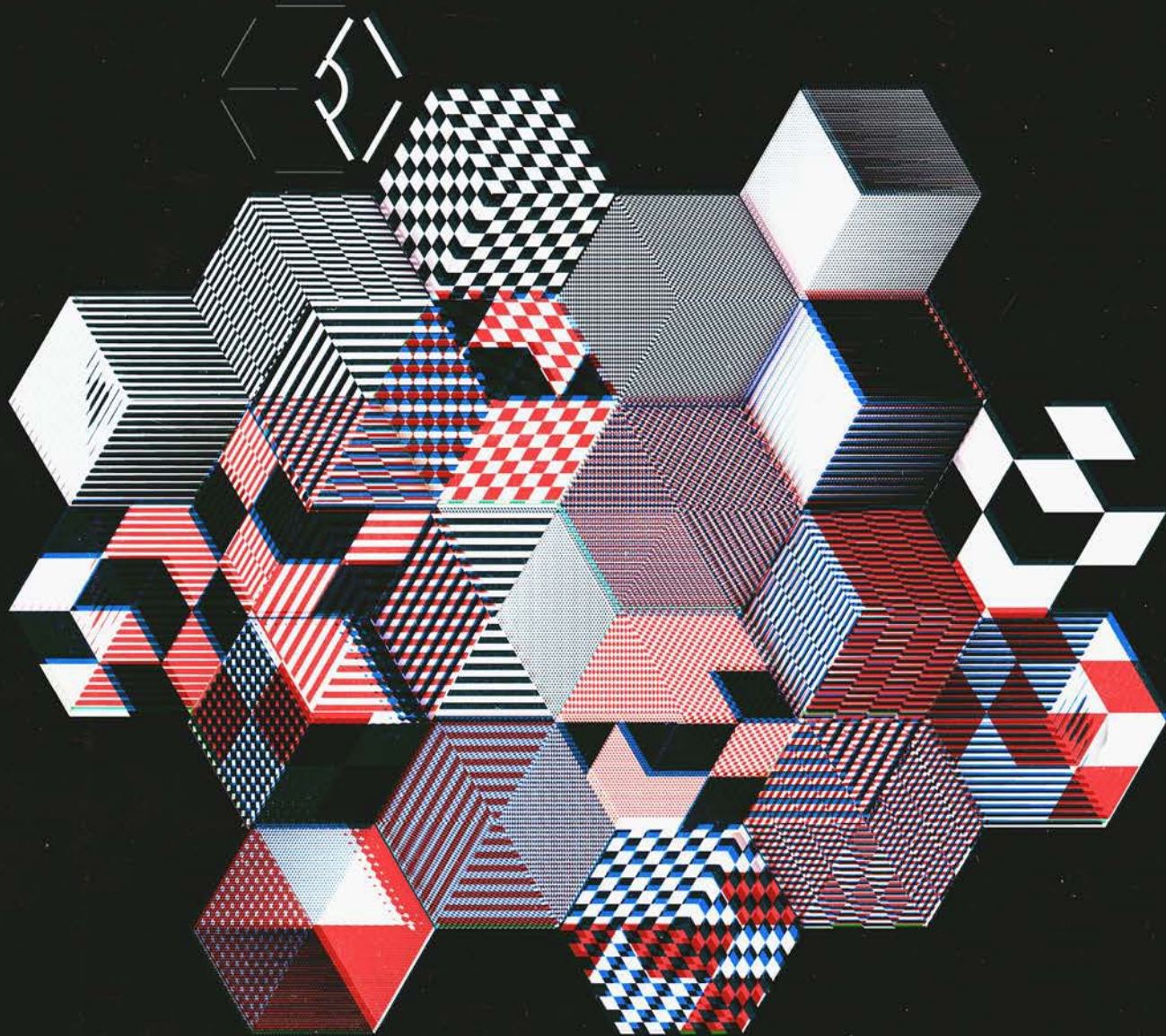
Raphael Lübke

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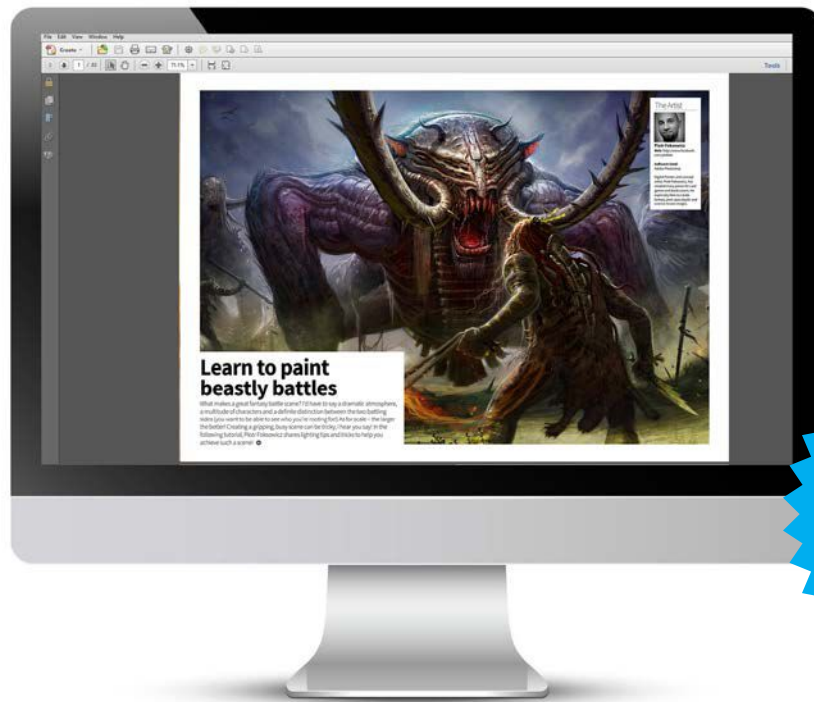
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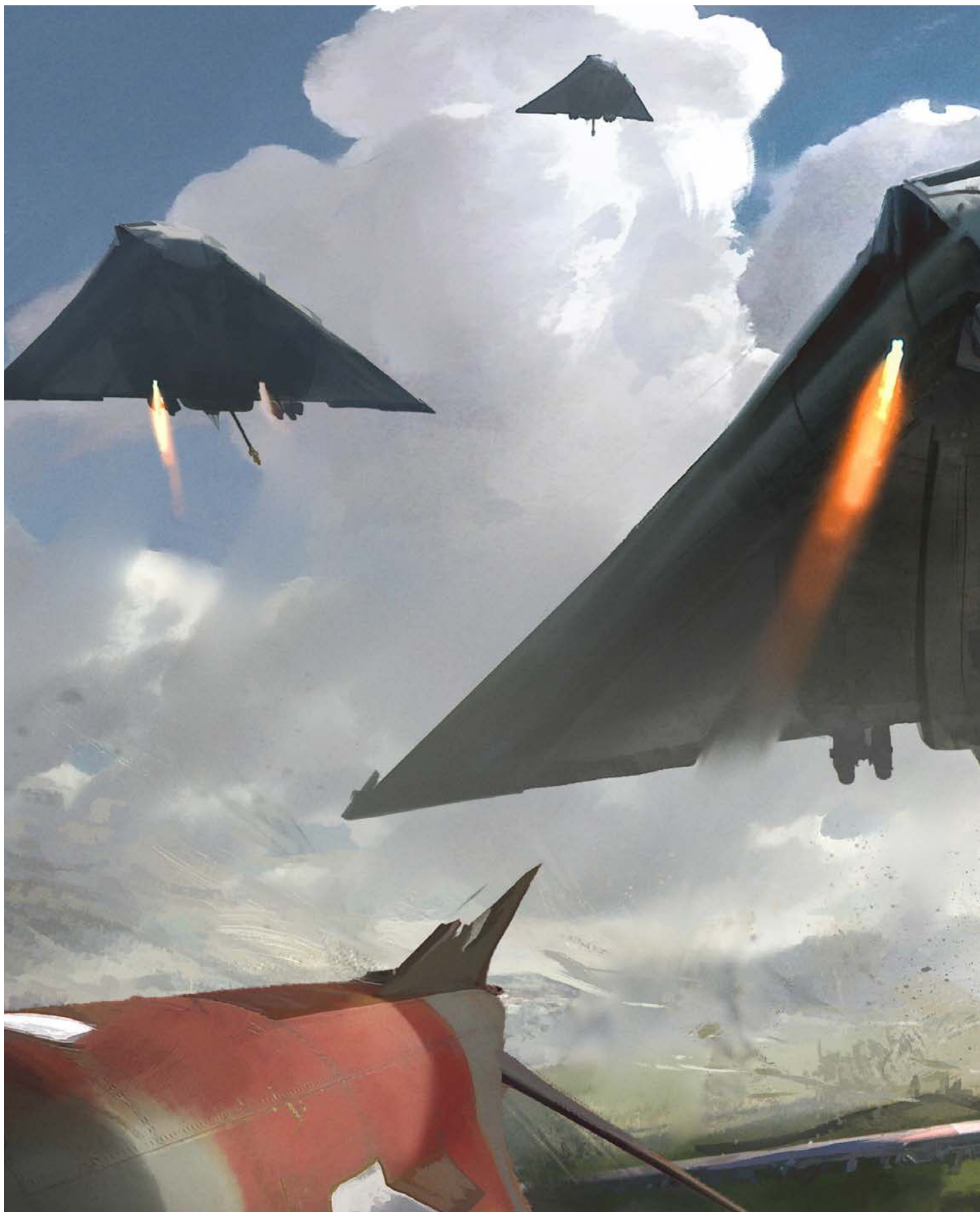
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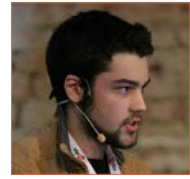


Craft an air vehicle

Efflam Mercier demonstrates how he crafts compositions and develops a simple visual narrative around a spaceship piece [▶](#)



The Artist



Efflam Mercier
efflammercier.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Efflam Mercier is a freelance concept artist and consultant, working for VFX and game companies; he enjoys experimenting with different processes and loves lighting.

Discover top tips for painting air vehicles in action...

I like to tackle all my images as if they were screen grabs out of a movie, treating the image as a moment rather than a presentation piece. Both methods are good, but creating these moments (or key frames) is where I'm having the most fun!

My process is very organic; I don't hesitate to change things at the last minute if it improves the composition or the story. Adding or removing a detail, color shifting, editing a character, or tweaking tones can dramatically change the story.

I don't want the viewer to get all the answers directly in the painting, I try to engage the audience into figuring out the story themselves; there's just a frame of the main action, and hints for back-story.

What also helps me a lot is doing lots of images really quickly. Do you ever feel frustrated when you're spending hours on a painting and it's not working? I have a lot more fun if I bring four paintings to a speed painting stage, then I can really see which ones are worth my time or not!

01 Photo research and inspiration: I always start projects by looking at real world examples. This time I'm using Flickr to find



01

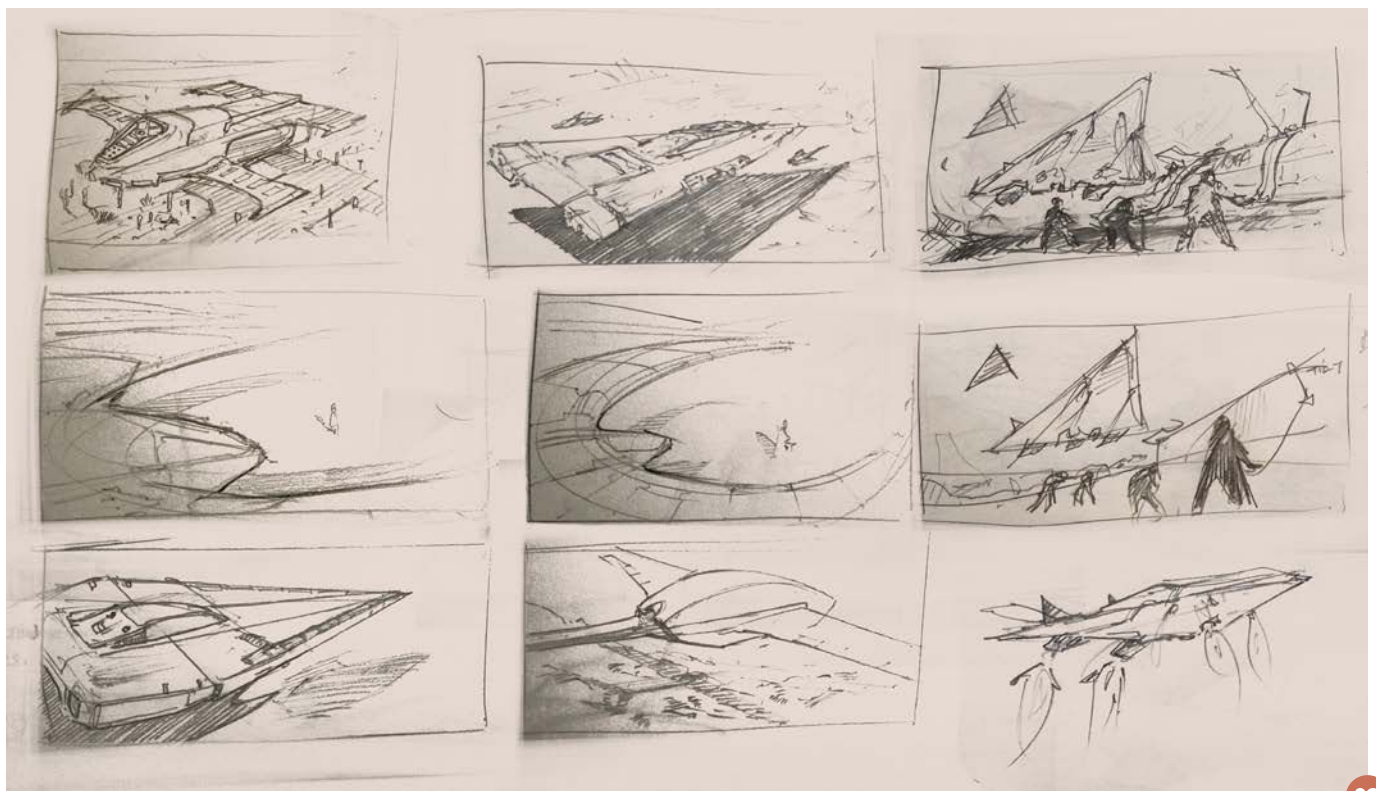
Creative Commons images, (this isn't required for concepts you would do in a studio or for a freelance client, as it's an internal communication and it's not the 'product' itself you're selling as a design consultant, but it's important to have permission for promotional pieces and images for print).

I'm looking for images with a strong composition (wide angles with lots of perspective work – great to make an impressive picture and a sense of frozen motion) to show off scale and context. Images shot on a Telephoto (top right one on this reference board) have this 'graphic' quality that I

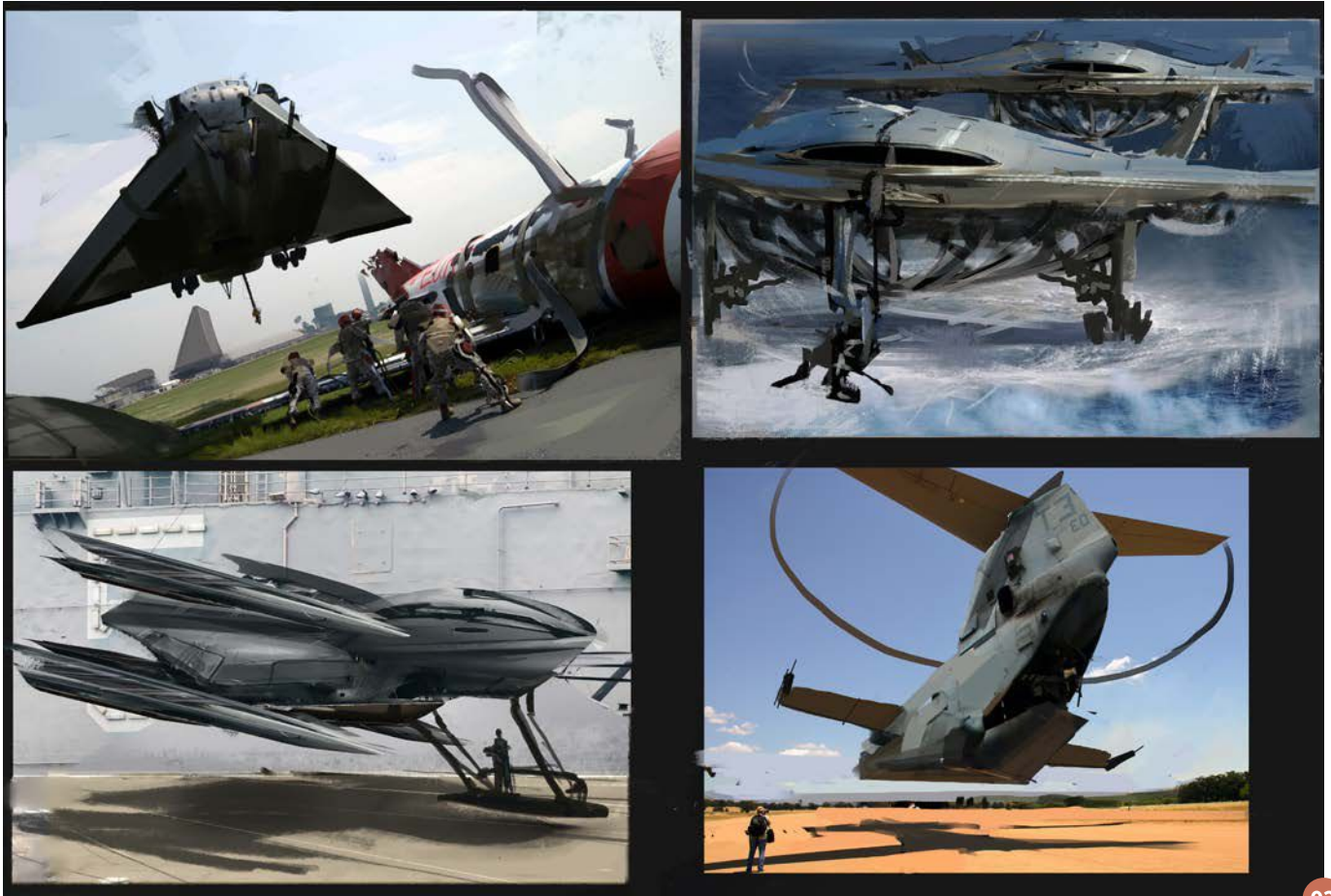
really enjoy, as the person is really far away and super zoomed in, the perspective is reduced to an almost orthographic image. I would suggest to anyone who wants to be a concept artist to learn and practice photography on the side too, it will improve your image-making skills a lot.

02 Visual notes and thumbnails: Now that I have the photos, I take my sketchbook and start making thumbnails while thinking about the photos I've selected.

What I'm trying to do is achieve the same power of the composition, without the artificially



02



03

composed look that concept art often has, you've probably heard about the rule of thirds a thousand times, right?

Well, at one point, I realized pretty much 90-percent of my portfolio was heavily relying on placing stuff on thirds, and this has sort of become a concept art trope. It's something I'm trying to get away from now, if you have the same issues, try to play with these alternative rules:

- Repeat shapes that overlap and show depth (you don't always need lots of perspective)
- Make objects so big that they are cropped out of the frame
- Place the camera upside down/looking up, changing the way we usually look at things

03 Doing efficient photo compositing: Using photos is an extremely powerful tool in concept art for AAA games and VFX – in my freelance and studio work; I'm asked pretty much 50-percent of the time to start from a photo, why?

As games and visual effects become more and more detailed, the tool of communication is photo references.

Sometimes even before any thumbnail sketches are completed, the director would collect a lot of

PRO TIP

Story and design

I judge the quality of a story by how many time I can ask "why?" and find a logical answer, as long as people keep looking at the image and come up with their own stories, the 'system' doesn't break.

Having a logical story and design can make the difference between "Paint this really well" or "What would you see for this scene?" Have clients valuing your opinion versus your picture-making abilities.

images from Pinterest, and just by talking we are able to get a good amount of art direction done, thus eliminating the need for countless variations upon variations.

I just provide one or two directions, and then the director might ask to combine your design with some of the shapes from another reference.

Technique-wise, I keep this very simple; I work on only two layers, painting on top of the photo with a simple Chalk brush, sampling colors from the image.

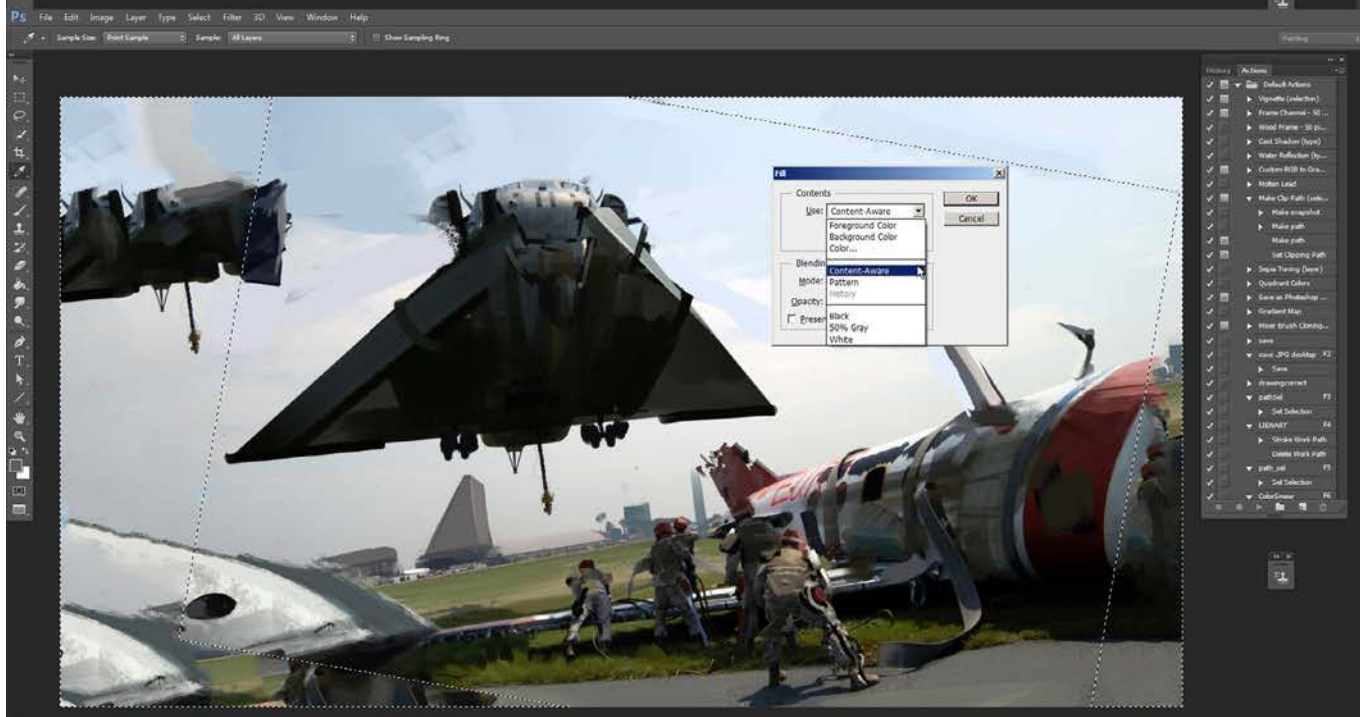
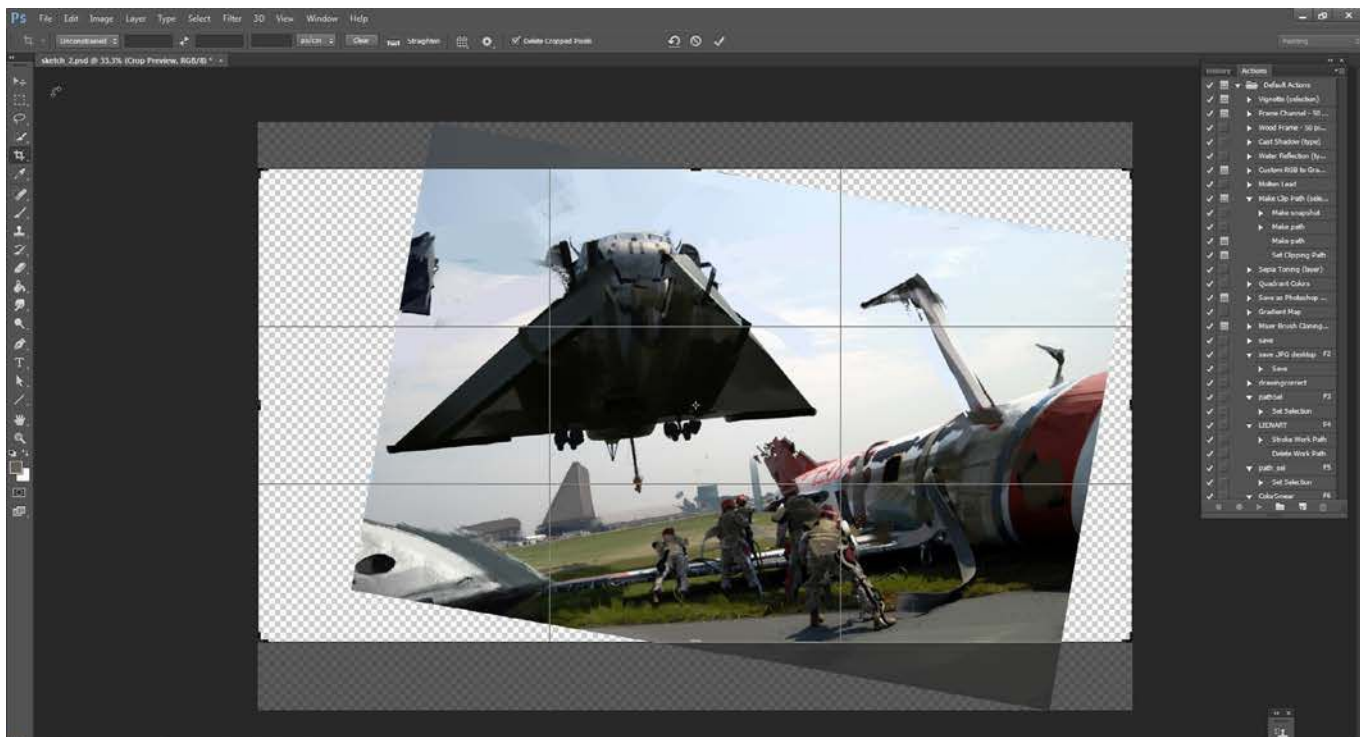
I spend 15-minutes on each then move on to the next one, I don't hesitate to make big changes and transform things around.

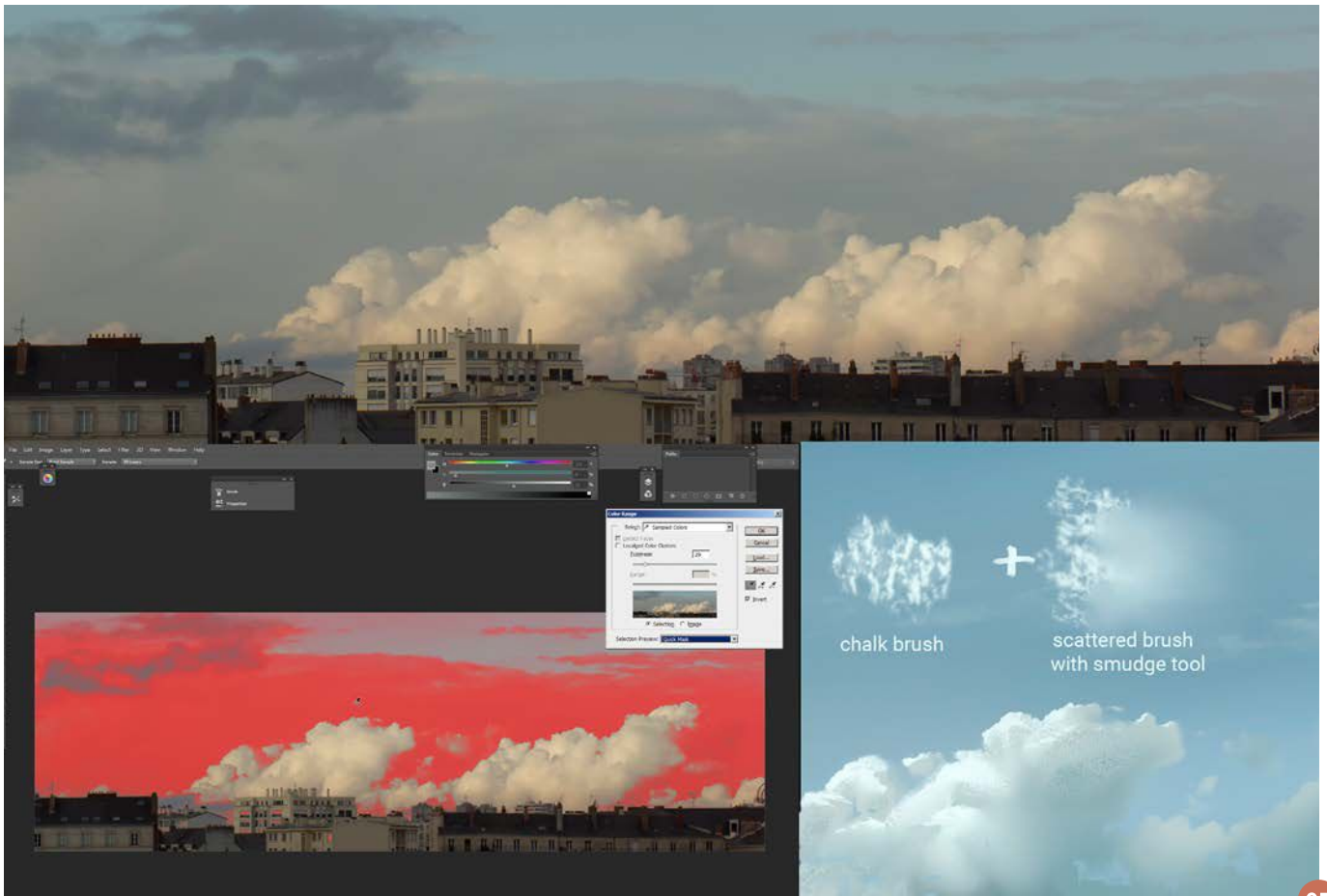
04 Tweaking the composition and extending the frame: I like it when images look cinematic, therefore I'm going to take the Crop tool and extend the composition horizontally to give more room for the action. ►

01 Reference images to generate composition ideas

02 I always carry around a moleskine sketchbook to record visual notes

03 I choose the top-left one for this tutorial. The top-right was cool as well, though the bottom ones look artificial



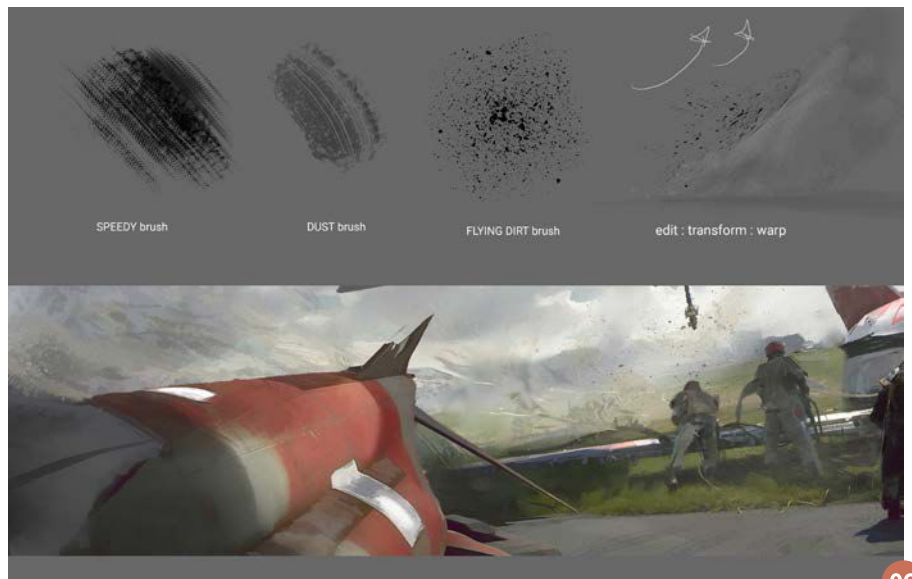


05

I call 'widescreen' anything that is wider than 16:9 in ratio (your screen is most likely 16:9 too). Anything that is wider creates black bars on the top and bottom of the screen because it's unused. Unconsciously, we associate any picture with a wider ratio to films we've seen, 2, 35:1, 1.85:1 and 3:1 are very popular film width/height ratios.

When you use the Crop tool to extend, you will probably get this checkerboard transparency showing underneath. One simple trick I use is Ctrl+clicking on the painting/photo layers, then I use Ctrl+Shift+I to invert selection. The last thing I do is press Shift+F5 which will bring up the Fill menu. Select Content-Aware in the Use drop-down menu – this is now automatically filling up the areas with details and colors it sampled in the picture. You might have some weird artifacts, but most of the job is done – no more transparent areas here.

05 Replacing the background: Painting realistic clouds is incredibly time-consuming, and integrating photo clouds into a painting is tricky. To create clouds I often take the shapes from photos then paint them with my own values. I use Select > Color Range to isolate the silhouette of the cloud. Then I use the selection as a Layer Mask on a new layer and I paint with my own colors. I use a Chalk brush to get the



06

hard-light shapes, then the Smudge tool for soft transitions. Lastly, try adding a soft gradient in Lighten Mode.

06 Adding atmosphere and dust blast: As the spaceship is arriving, dust and dirt are lifting off; to paint it I use two or three brushes and the Warp tool.

I add the normal dust, then with another color I add fast flying dust puffs with the speedy brush, ►

04 I wanted to keep the shape of the ship extremely simple so it creates a more striking composition

05 Painting in clouds with a photo I took in Brittany, France. The weather is bad but the clouds are gorgeous

06 Create dust and atmosphere



07

and finally some flying dirt. In the process I always follow the logic of helicopter or jet landings: directionality, turbulence, and zone of affect.

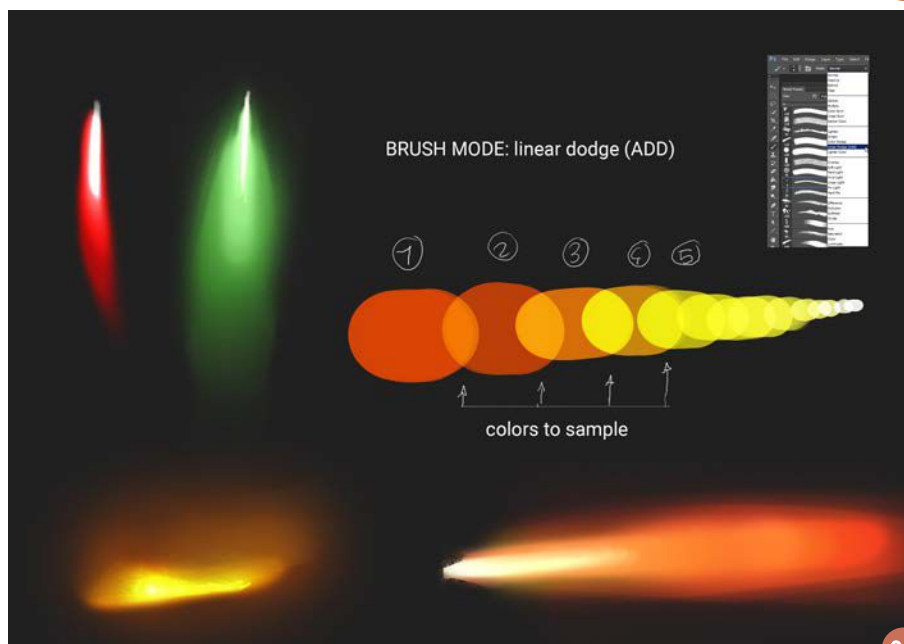
First, you have to choose the direction. Turbulence is this wave-like motion, such as ripples on the water or wind bouncing off surfaces. The zone of affect is where it's affecting, and with the perspective, the delimitation of the blast can look very sharp!

Once this is done I realize this is a bit too much contrast, so I add a Lighten layer and take a big Soft brush and paint the whole area in a beige, dusty color. I also hint at some atmospheric perspective on the distant spaceships by adding some light blue at low opacity.

07 Reviewing the story and staging: At this stage, I look back at the image and critique it. Is it a clear simple story; are some details conflicting with others? Is it logical? I'm asking myself as many 'why' questions as I possibly can.

Why are these spaceships hovering/about to land? These planes look very old, it's an abandoned airfield, maybe the spaceship are moving the planes to somewhere else, so that's what the cables straps are for.

08 Painting the rocket exhaust: This one is very practical; I realized in step 7 that I needed something to stop the spaceship from falling. I'm not an engineer so I couldn't figure out a functional and logical way to have rotor blades inside these triangle-shaped ships, so instead I went for jet exhausts!



08

Take a color that is very red, but a tiny bit more towards orange than purple, create a new layer and set it to Add mode, paint big strokes with a medium-soft brush, then color sample the resulting color, and paint in the areas closer to the source of the light, each time color sampling the brightest area – it will automatically shift toward yellow then white, in a very natural and realistic way. For the blurring effect, it's using the same smudging technique from step 5 – a Chalk brush with scattering in the Smudge tool, smearing color across to create the 'heat blur'.

09 Polishing: Remove clutter! I'm taking out these two guys, three is enough and it's hard to read their silhouettes. I just paint on top with the colors that would be behind.

I'm also darkening the guy closest to the camera to make him separate from the other soldiers; he hasn't been hit by the blast yet. Having the shadow from the ship was cool, but I needed to make it readable, so I bent the physics a bit here.

I'm still tweaking the composition in the polishing phase. The ships were going in conflicting directions, but I wanted them to go the same way; it will make the image more powerful.

I'm also going to attenuate all the details coming from the photo elements, as they always come with a lot of unnecessary noisy areas. You can use Filter Gallery, but it leaves its mark – it's probably better to do the simplification by hand, giving it a human touch.

10 Finishing 2.0: I eliminate or tone down the distracting bits: strokes that are very small and sharp and have lots of value contrast. I use Paint Daubs or Median or other filters to 'group' those small brushstrokes or photo-details together by averaging them.

I'm going to the channels and doing a horizontal Motion Blur on the Blue channel and a really small Gaussian Blur (0.3px) on the green.

I take a scan of real film grain and put it in Overlay Mode to break the digital look – this helps to hide the differences between the photo and painted areas, rendering them invisible.

Then Ctrl+Alt+Shift+E merged copy, go to Filter > Camera Raw, and increase the Clarity slider. I put a Layer Mask on this merged copy, then I paint in the areas that I want to accentuate. I keep it subtle because it's easy to ruin a composition instead of improving it. ●



07 I make notes on the painting, most of the time only mentally, but you can add them on a separate layer

08 I've sharpened a lot of the 'hot white' area, reinforcing the sense of light

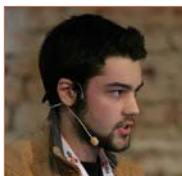
09 Making last tweaks to the image

10 Making subtle differences with filters



10

The Artist



Efflam Mercier
efflammercier.com







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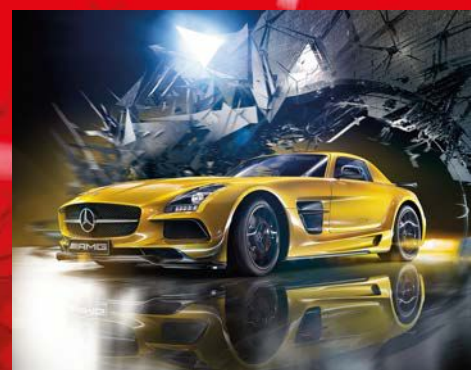
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The Artist



Brun Croes
bruncroes.com

Brun Croes is a freelance illustrator working in the animation, games and entertainment industry. He's been active as a professional for four years focusing mainly on visual development.



Design and sketch an environment

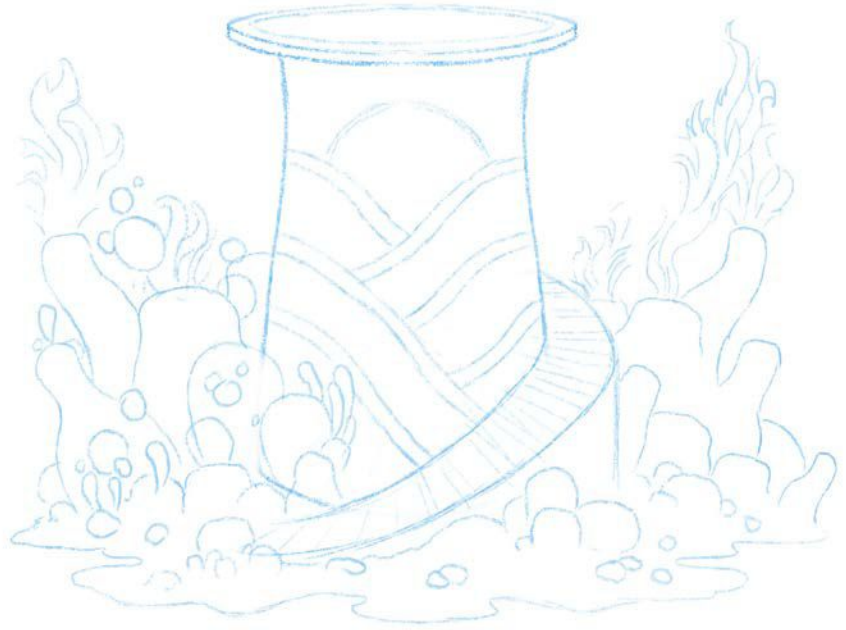
Brun Croes demonstrates how to develop an environment using sketching techniques ▶

Brun Croes reveals his process for developing an environment

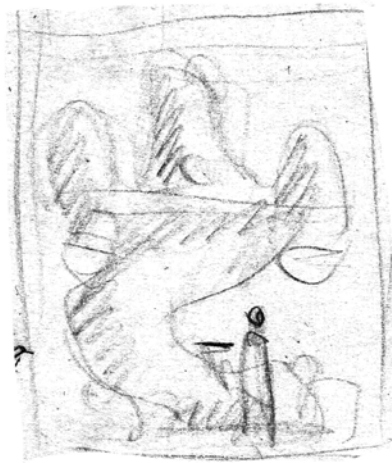
It's time to start thinking about our environment. In this tutorial the drawing has been divided into different segments (character, creature, and scene) in order to make it more digestible for you. However it's always a good idea to think about all of the elements together at a thumbnail stage before dividing them into separate pieces. This is what you will see in the next page.

Thumbnails and composition

Thumbnails help us to come up with a few ideas and to quickly look at how we might fit those ideas into a composition without having to draw it out on a large scale. Thumbnails often contain something delicate that is difficult to translate into a final drawing, so enjoy making them. Use them to explore your different ideas.



- Before starting on any of these chapters I sit back and enjoy drawing small thumbnails, focusing on composition and rough ideas.



- Thumbnails are meant to be small and though no fixed size is attached to them it is generally accepted to be around the size of a thumb, hence its name.



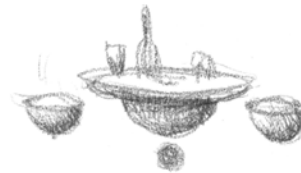
- Thumbnails are a quick way to come up with ideas and to give you a quick look at how the end result might look. Use this to your advantage.

- When drawing a few thumbnails, you'll quickly notice returning ideas, such as the long table, with the creatures on top and the main character at the bottom. This tells us a bit about the story, making the main character underneath the creatures gives us a sense of different classes. The creatures are clearly the masters.

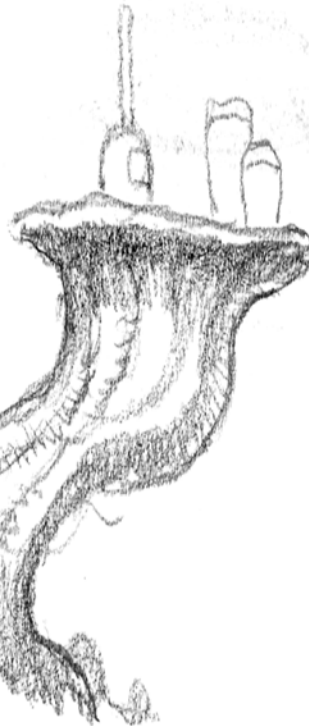
Exploring the surroundings further: part 1

Now that I have figured out a rough idea with aliens sitting at the top of an organic-looking table with their human servant below, I start thinking about the design of individual elements such as the table.

- I want the table to be organic, so these extra thumbnail sketches of tables will help me develop a look that's still organic and one that will fit into the story.



- Organic designs can be handled in a few different ways. We can choose to make the table from natural elements or we can choose to design it with curves and organic looking forms, or a combination of both.



- For our story I find it's best to stick with something that's still man made (or creature made!) instead of something that has grown naturally. This will help sell the alien setting and the fact that the aliens have some form of intelligence.

- Experiment with various sizes and designs before committing to a single idea.

Exploring the surroundings further: part 2

Around the table I imagine a collection of organic growth that has almost become a part of the table itself. I want the plants to resemble elements of the table as if the table could be a big plant that has been modified to become a table.

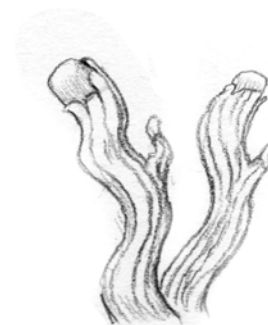
- All these plants are slightly based on each other – while drawing one you'll get the inspiration to do a slight variation of it for another version. Exploring their different looks and combining them all later will achieve that feeling of diversity.



- Different plants of different sizes can help to give the illusion of variety as is the case in nature.



- I imagine the plants producing some sort of oxygen bubbles, giving them small gaps and openings through which the bubbles escape. This suggests that the plants have a purpose and therefore the story is enhanced further.



- I chose to build up most of the plants with vertical line patterns, to reflect the lines present in the table and on some part of the creatures.

01 Making our environment blueprint:

Now that we have an idea of what our surroundings will look like, let's start building up the blueprints for our environment. The table will be the central point so let's start by drawing this first, as all the rest of the surrounding elements will be built up around it. I start with a flattened ellipse to suggest the tabletop. I then add two mirroring curved lines to suggest the body and shape of the table.

02 Take the stairs: Around the table I add a staircase. This will have several purposes, the primary one being that our main character needs a way of getting to the top of the table. Another purpose being more psychological, where the top of the table represents a better place than the bottom. This, together with the angry creatures at the top, helps to convey the story of the image.

03 Silhouettes: I want to place some of the plants we've designed into the composition, so I add them in a somewhat symmetrical way. In combination with the shape of the table they form a pyramid-like composition, further helping to lead the viewer's eyes upwards.

In order to add the plants, I think of them as silhouettes, simplifying the exploration sketches we made earlier and focusing on the 'skyline' and silhouettes of their forms. This helps me to think of them in the context of the composition, rather than focusing on their details just yet.

04 Bubbles!: It's time to add the bubbles. In our exploration steps I imagined our plants having the function of producing oxygen bubbles. I want to create a flowing movement, so at the points where the bubbles are coming out of

- Copy the vertical mirroring lines of the table using a light box so they match, making your table feel stable



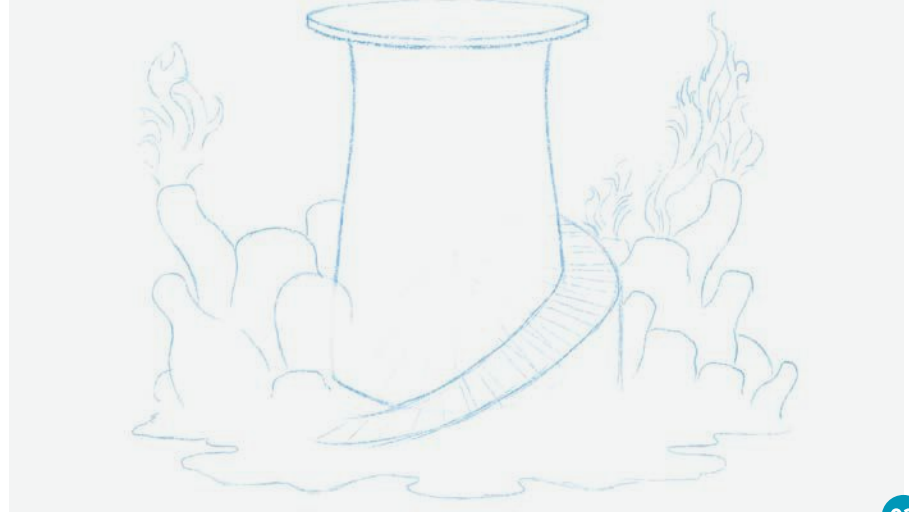
01

- For the stairs I add a central point in the table and a circle of lines to become the steps



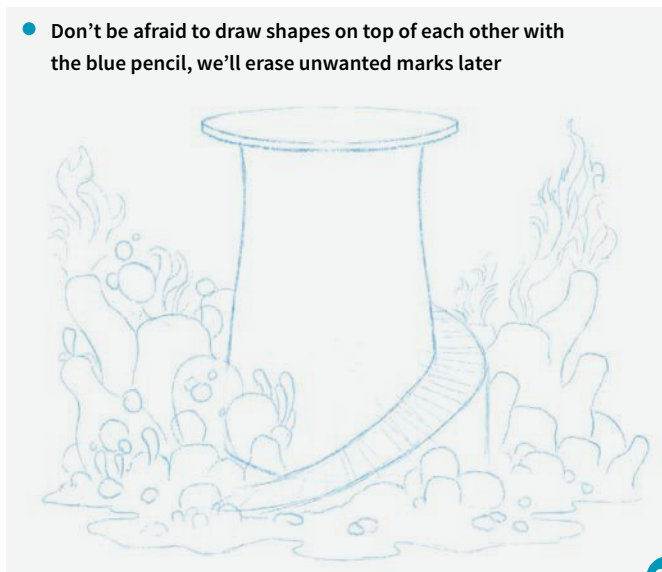
02

- To frame your image, add a floor to your drawing to ground it instead of just floating in mid air



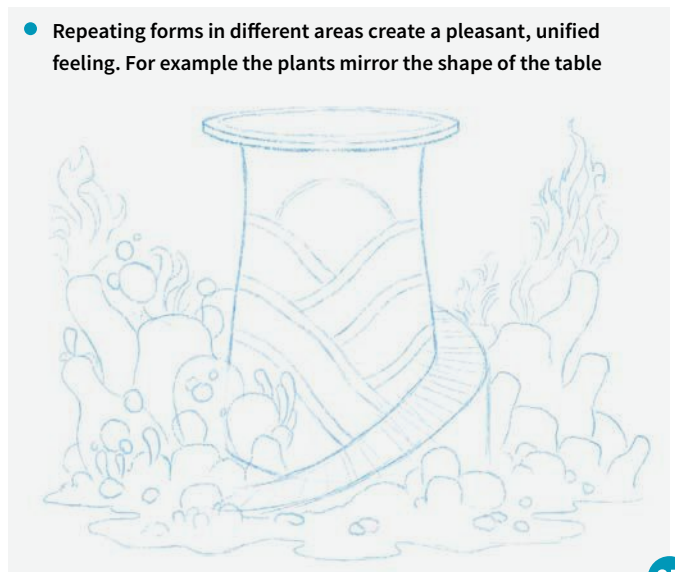
03

- Don't be afraid to draw shapes on top of each other with the blue pencil, we'll erase unwanted marks later



04

- Repeating forms in different areas create a pleasant, unified feeling. For example the plants mirror the shape of the table



05

the plants I make the bubbles elongated in shape, and where they are disconnected from the plants I make them more circle-like. This helps to convey a feeling of motion, as if the oxygen bubbles snap or detach from the plants.

05 Adding to the table: It's time to add some design elements on our table. I know that our main character will be in front of part of the table and the rest of our composition is a pyramid pointing upwards. I use the design of the table to point more towards the character by placing wave-like lines that bend down towards where the main character is standing. I also add a circle around the area where the character's head and helmet will be. This will give a place to rest with our eye in the grand scheme of the composition of the complete illustration.

06 Following the lines: Now it's time to render our environment. With our blue guidelines in place I start to add more definition to the table and stairs, using the pre-made circle grid to determine where the steps will be. This will be important as our character will be walking upon it. Make a part of the stairs curve away behind the table to emphasize that it is going upwards, wrapping around the table. I've added some vertical lines to the table to make a connection between several parts of the illustration as a whole.

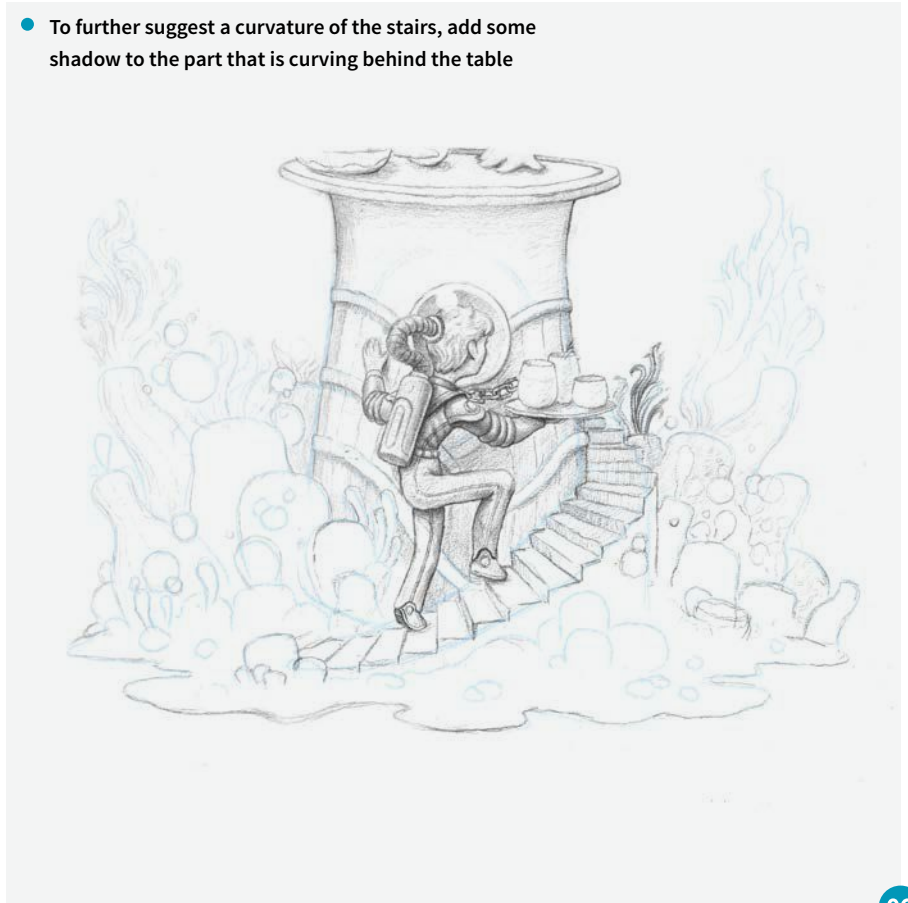
07 Enhancing the table: The table is the central point, so I start here by adding the first layer of shading. I start by adding small, darker parts on the places that will receive the least amount of light. These are mainly present underneath the table top, where there will be a shadow cast from the table top onto the body of the table itself. I also add a shadow cast from the main character onto the table body in order to push the character further forward, and to suggest that the two are close to each other.



PRO TIP Symmetrical, but not quite

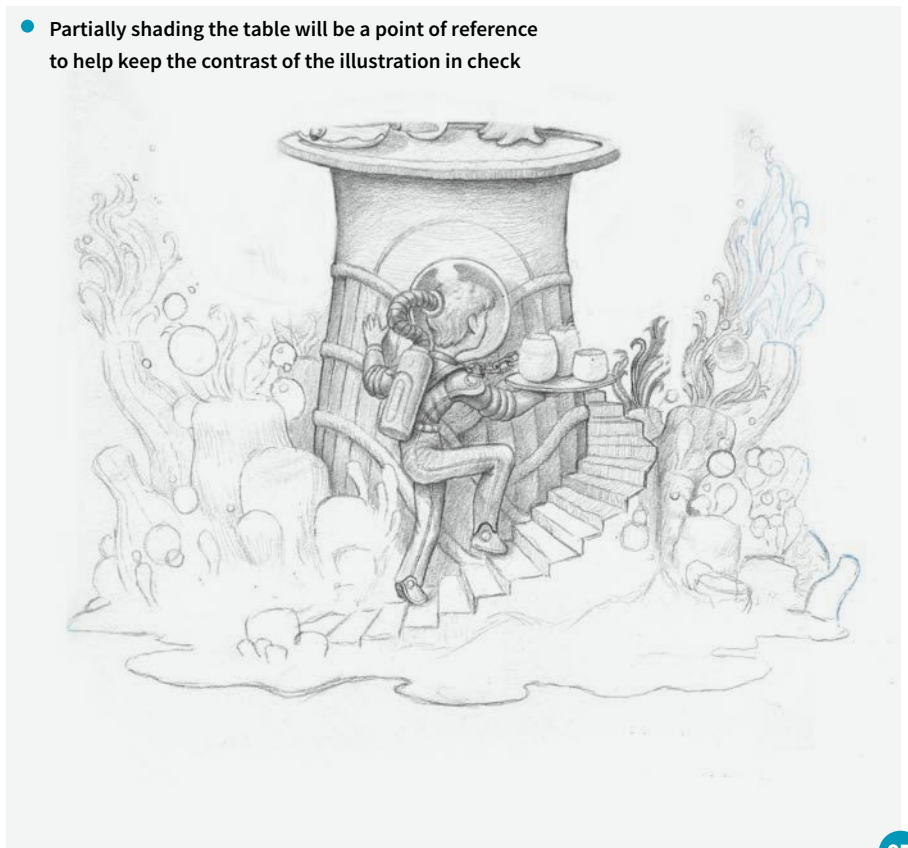
I like symmetrical drawings, but they often look boring all too quickly. A good way to prevent this is to add some subtle changes, and only keep the general lines symmetrical instead of mirroring every small part. Keeping some elements asymmetrical can help to avoid boring repetition.

- To further suggest a curvature of the stairs, add some shadow to the part that is curving behind the table



06

- Partially shading the table will be a point of reference to help keep the contrast of the illustration in check



07

For the vertical lines, which represent a plank-like structure, I shade in different tones: darkest to the sides of the table and lightest towards where

our character is standing in the middle. This will provide some contrast between the character and the table. ▶

- For parts that follow patterns of vertical lines (the table and some plants) shade using vertical marks, further enhancing form



08

08 More shading and definition: Now I add some shading to the plants. I start by shading the plants that are in the back, furthest away from us. They will be the darkest. It's a good idea to set a point of reference for your shading, as I did with the table. Setting a point that will be the darkest area and a point that will be the whitest area will help you to keep your values in relation to each other.

For the bubbles, I use the same method as I did with the main character's helmet, giving them a bright white highlight and a reflection light/line along the side, with a gradient going from darkest at the top to lightest at the bottom. This is another visual nod at creative repetition throughout your painting as there's a connection between the oxygen bubbles and the helmet of our main character.

09 Shadows: Let's start to think a bit more about shadows and cast shadows. I don't tend to accentuate my cast shadows as hard as I should; it's almost a style choice for me as I mostly add them in later when coloring my pencil drawings. It's still a good thing to think about though.

There's a dark shadow on the stairs from both our table and our main character. This shadow further develops onto the plants in the back behind the stairs. The plants at the front left also cast some shadow on top of each other. A simple trick to use

- The brightest part of the drawing is at the bottom, keeping the focus higher up where the story is happening



09

- Keeping parts of the illustration almost untouched creates a contrast between a finished look and a sketchy feel



10

is to keep the brightest up front and the darkest in the back – a simple yet effective way of suggesting some depth in your illustration.

10 Cleaning up: Let's finish up our drawing by enhancing our shadow areas even more. It's time to start thinking about contrast again. In this case, there are a lot of overlapping

parts. Make the parts where the overlapping is most clear a bit darker. Also darken the outline shapes of the elements that are in the front of the composition to make them pop even more. I use another piece of tissue paper to soften up some parts and darken some whites ever so slightly. This way the bright spot on the character's helmet and some of the oxygen bubbles will really shine. •



Brun Croes
bruncroes.com

- A look at our final drawing, where every piece has come together to form a uniform final illustration



- Throughout the illustration there are several repeating design choices that translate into a feeling of unity and style. Such as the vertical lines present in the creatures, the table and the surrounding plants.

- Our composition is built up so that all the directional lines point upwards, leading our eye from the main character to the creatures. This is enhanced by the stairs which is going upwards from the character to the creatures.
- The rule of three: If you add something to your scene, be it patterns, objects or shape form, make sure to repeat it at least three times. This results in conscious choices leaving us with a good design and a unified end result.

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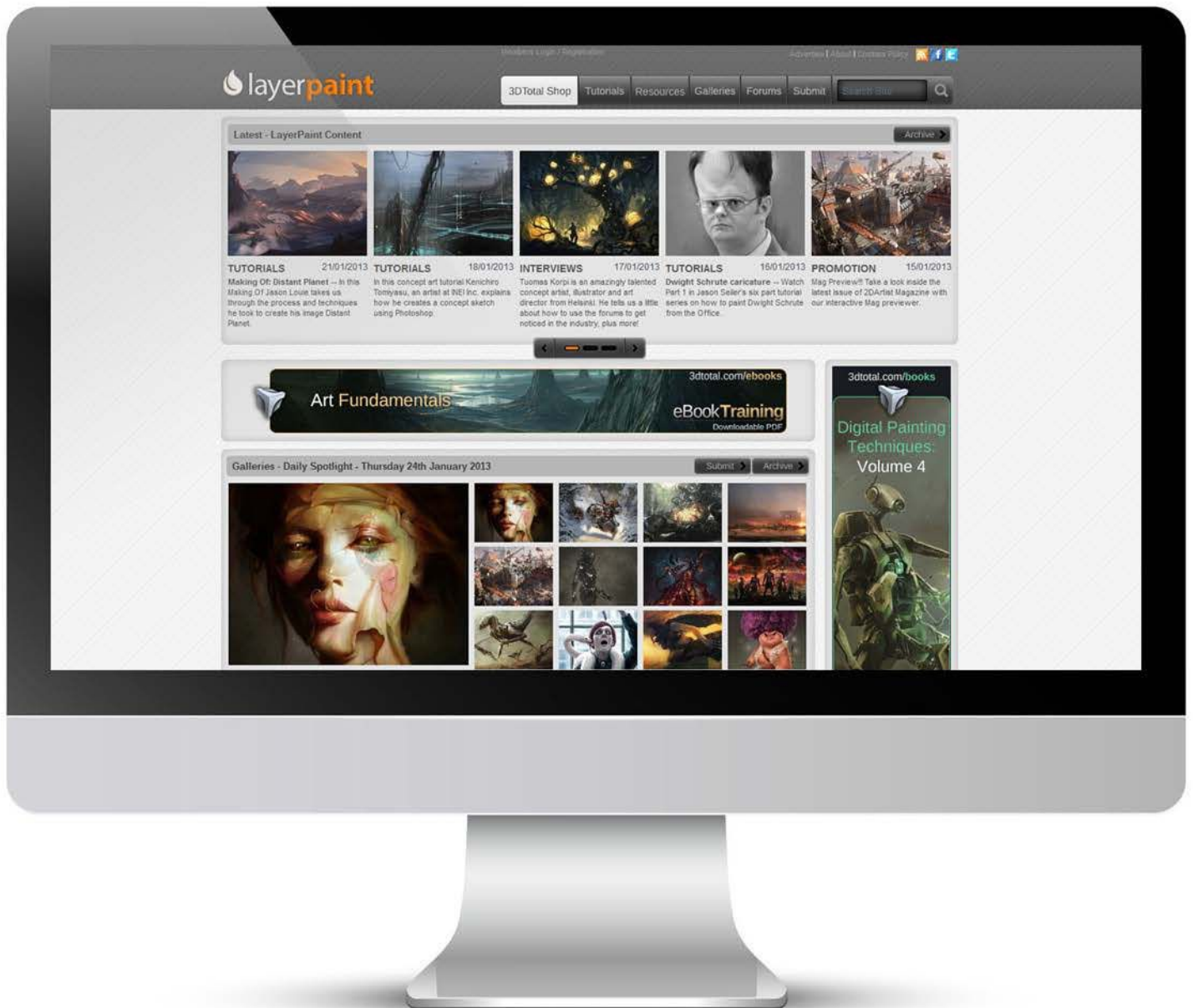
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The Artist



Juan Pablo Roldan
artstation.com/artist/roldan

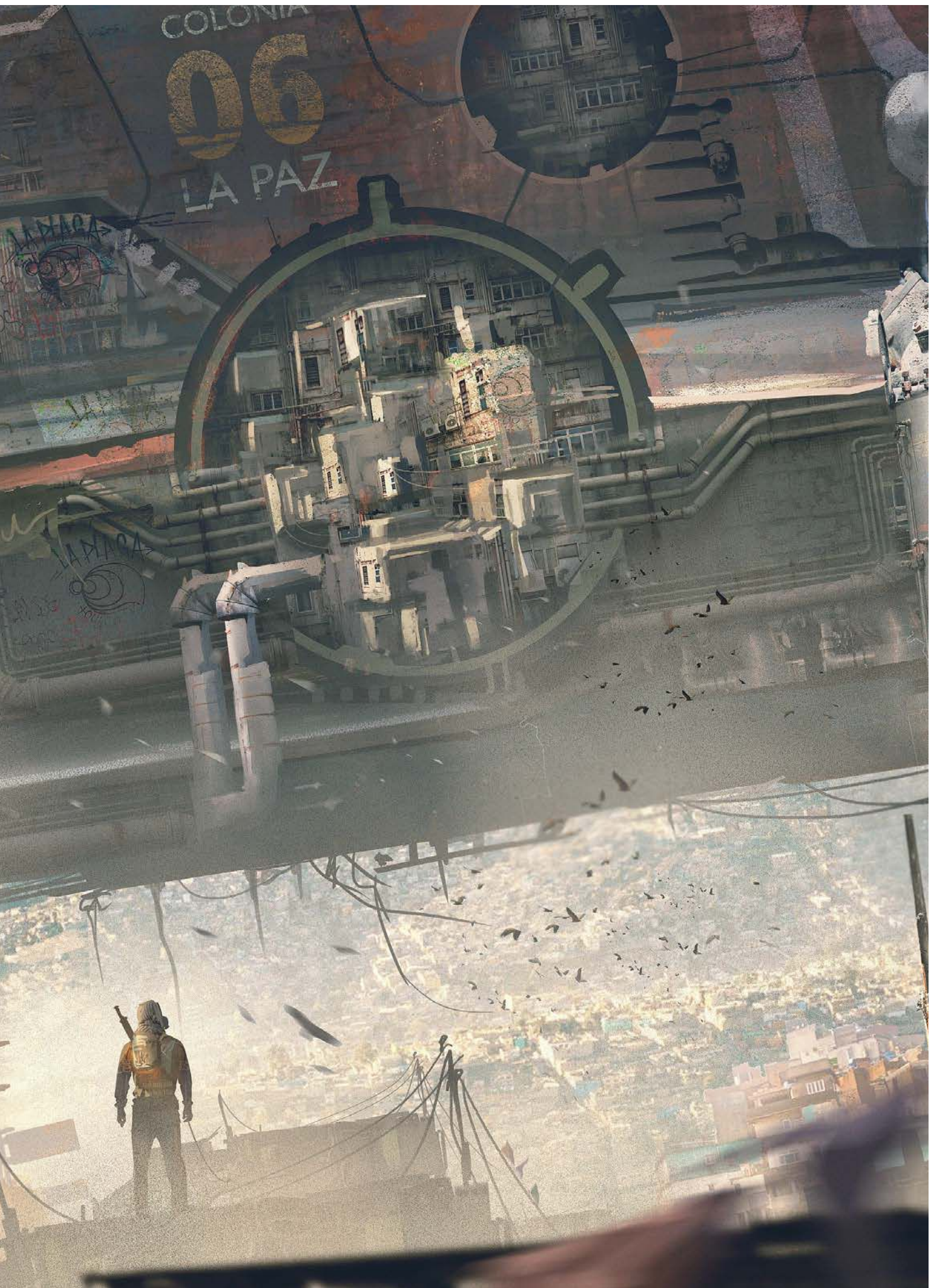
Software Used:
Photoshop

Juan is currently working as a concept artist for different writers, videogames, movie and TV companies. One of them is Through the Lens Entertainment where he is in charge of the visual development of pitches for TV series, movies, short films and innovative entertainment technology.

Create a scene of epic proportions

Juan Pablo Roldan explains how to create a strong depth of field in a detailed environment, sharing invaluable techniques for the initial composition with silhouettes, focal point definition, atmospheric perspective, ambient and key light set up, and texture choice. In addition, he shares top tips for texture integration, color extraction, noise and atmosphere, rhythm of the elements, enhancing and final post-production ▶





Discover top techniques for achieving a sense of depth in your sci-fi scenes...

Colony-La Paz is inspired by the overcrowded South American cities. I'm thinking of a concept in a distant future where we can see a kind of floating city that looks like a huge air vehicle. What I have in mind is not a utopian, neat and perfect future, but an arid, dusty and messy place; the consequence of the current environmental problems plaguing many of those cities.

You will learn the techniques I apply to my everyday concept art for film, TV and videogames. At the first stage (initial composition), we are going to see how the image starts to come along. I'm starting the composition using black-and-white silhouettes

to understand the values, setting up the type of lighting and the places where I'm using it, and arranging the elements in the scene in a tidy way. In addition, I'm giving the scene a rhythm and a sense of depth of field by the correct use of scale and repetition.

At the second stage (color and texture integration) I'm explaining how to extract color from a picture and start to generate materials of the vehicle that should look rusty and corroded. I'm also defining the ambient and key light that will help me to reinforce the focal point to read and to understand all the elements in the scene.

Finally, in the last stage (enhancing and final tricks) I'm adding more detail to some key elements, and also I'm going to share some useful tricks to add more realism to the scene.

01 Silhouettes, initial composition and rule of thirds: Usually before starting it's highly recommended to keep in mind the initial idea or concept of what the image would be. In this particular case, I have a massive air vehicle in mind that is crossing above a polluted and overpopulated city. I also want to show some balconies and house roofs in the image. The goal is to create a simple but effective composition with a strong depth of field by using repetitive elements and atmospheric perspective in a wise and careful way.

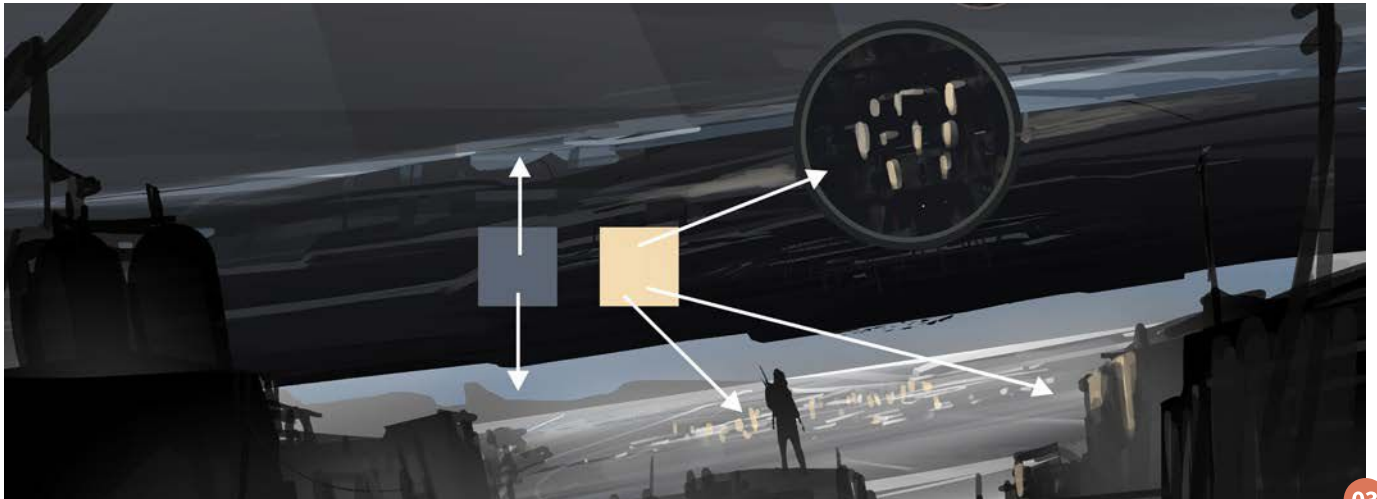
Now, I'm defining the main silhouettes in the scene: the ship, the city and the character (to establish the scale of the scene). This method is really handy because it allows me to locate the elements in an easy quick way, and make decisions regarding to the composition. I'm using the rule of thirds to define the point of



01



02



03



04

convergence. As you can see in the image, the upright intersection is my choice for the focal point. You should be mindful that at this early stage I'm setting up the concept of the scene by using silhouettes. So that is not necessary to add any detail.

02 Atmospheric perspective and values:

What I'm doing now is separating and adding more planes to the image. I'm using, in this case, up to five different grayscale tones. The foreground uses the darkest tones and the middle ground and background the lightest. Using tone distinction provides the image with a good sense of depth and scale with the illusion of atmospheric perspective.

It's very important, at this stage, to set up the focal point of the ship and the zones that will be affected by the light. Push silhouettes a little bit further; add some cables, TV antennas and crowded houses in the background to make them clear enough for the viewer.

03 Lighting, color and texture: One of the more common problems is to define the lighting and the color of an image. Eventually,

practice will help to enhance the pieces with interesting color diversity and accurate and believable lighting. One of the techniques that I strongly recommend, when you're a beginner, is to define the ambient and key light at an early stage. Keep in mind that the key light will be used to highlight the main focal points in the scene.

So now, it's time to add some color, defining the way the light will affect the elements in the scene. First of all, I'm choosing the ambient light tone. In this particular case, the light comes from the sky (skylight) therefore I choose a bluish clear tone that I'm applying to the background, the upper part of the ship and the majority of elements in the scene.

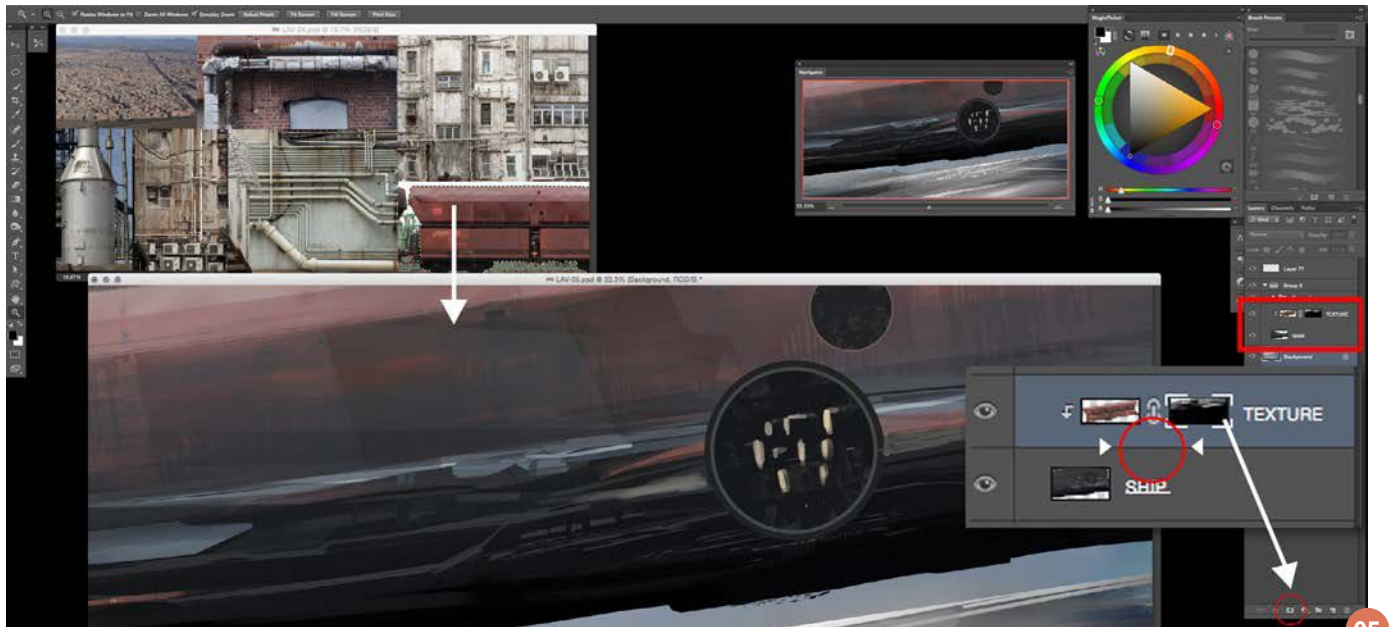
Then, I'm defining the key light. In this case, it's the light that comes from the sun and the most important light that I'm using to highlight the points where I want to generate more interest in the scene. As you can see in the image, I'm applying the light to the focal point that is already set up (the houses that stand out from the ship).

Also, I'm adding some light to the front of the houses in the background and in the foreground

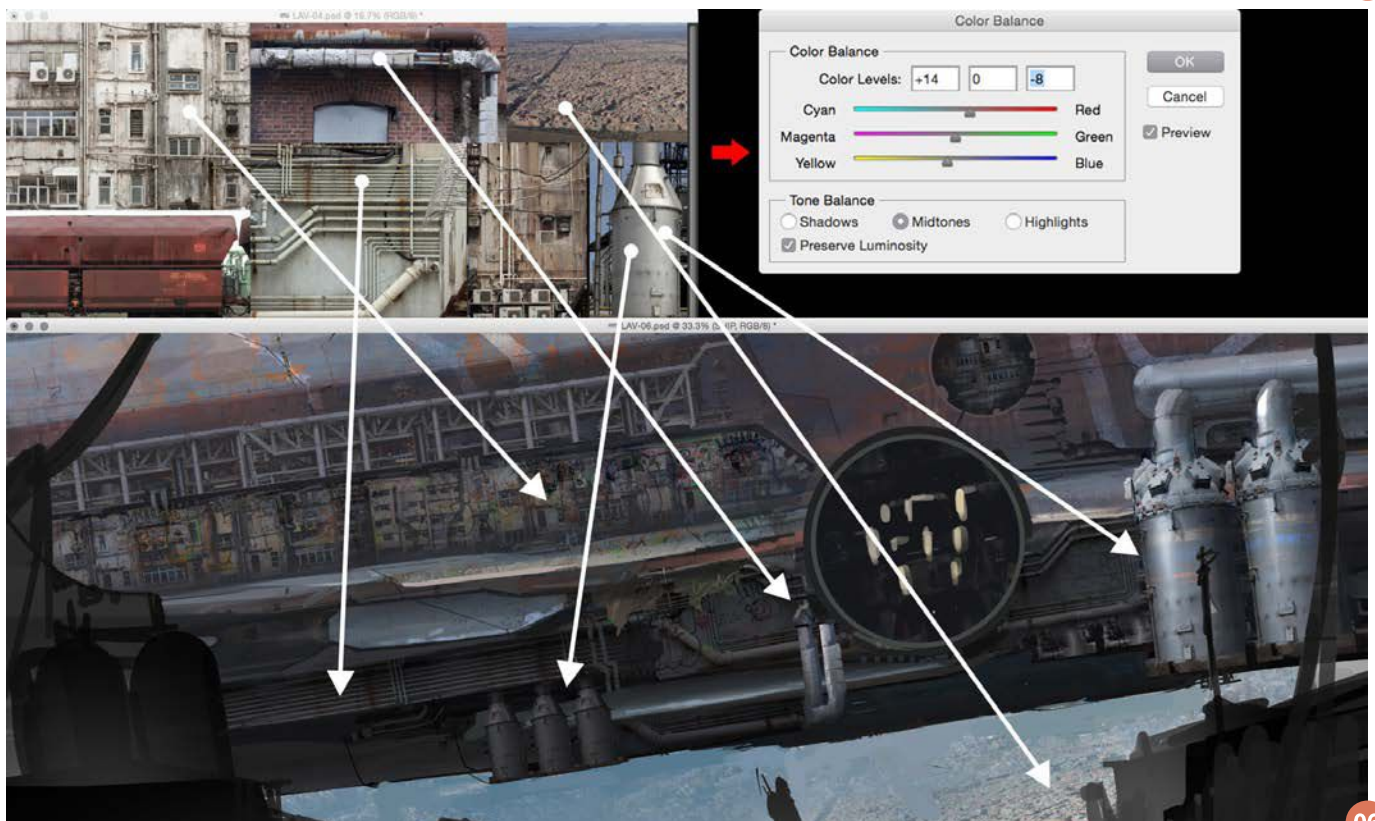
as well. The key light determines the direction of the cast shadow.

04 Textures: What I'm doing now, is gathering some texture images and pictures that I've chosen previously in a folder called 'references'. I will use all these images later on to extract some elements that will help me to clean up the scene and to add more detail to ▶

- 01** In this first step I'm defining the main silhouettes and the focal point. It's not necessary to add any detail
- 02** Now, I'm adding new planes to generate a strong sense of scale and depth
- 03** In this step, I'm defining the ambient light and the key light of the scene
- 04** I'm gathering a group of texture images and pictures that I will use to add color and shape to the elements, and to generate a strong sense of realism



05



06

the concept. Besides using color, photo textures will help to generate believable materials and to achieve a realistic scene.

The images have been downloaded from cgtextures.com. I always suggest doing some intense research previous to the image production, to gather a significant number of reference images according to the concept and idea that you want to convey.

This will help you to clarify what you want to do regarding the mood, materials, atmosphere,

color and lighting. Another point to be mindful of is what sort of image you're going to create or what are the requirements from the client you're working for.

Usually, when it comes to concept art for film or TV, the art direction looks to accomplish a realistic image. The correct balance between texture and painting helps me to achieve that goal.

05 Texture integration: It's time to enhance the image with textures and color. I start to work on the materials for the ship.

I'm using dusted and corroded metal textures and integrating them carefully, trying to keep a nice balance and not to overdo it.

Usually, I choose the texture I want to edit, placing it in a new layer on top of the silhouette that will be affected; in this case the silhouette of the ship. Now, I'm working with a Mask in the texture. Hold the Alt-key between these two layers (see image 05), this links the layer which contains the texture to the silhouette itself. Now that the texture is inside the confines of the silhouette of the ship, it's easy for me to edit it.



07



08

Before starting I need to be sure that the Mask is selected and is filled with black. Then, with the Brush tool, I start to paint with white. I use black as an eraser. Using different opacities with the brush will allow the image to appear, adding to the silhouettes texture and color.

06 Extraction: I continue incorporating more elements from textures and pictures that I've chosen previously into my scene to give the vehicle a realistic look. As you can see in the image, I'm adding some textures to the buildings to give the impression of a floating city. I've also selected some elements such as the tankers to represent some sort of engine or exhausts that I will use as elements that generate air pollution. For the background, I'm using a photograph of an overcrowded city of small buildings and narrow streets to generate strong depth and scale.

Previously, I've modified all the texture images with the Color Balance tool in order to create a

similar and coherent color palette to the final scene. I've also used Levels to adjust the lighting of the textures.

07 Pollution and smoke effect: Now, I'm focusing on the smoke effect and pollution in the scene. As I said before, I'm taking advantage of the textures that now look like chimneys coming from the vehicle. I'm trying to create the illusion that the ship is giving off smoke and dirty steam. This smoke will help to separate the foreground and generate some more depth to the environment.

What I'm doing in this case, is using a Smoke brush with some yellowish and dark tones to create the polluted and dirty atmosphere. When I'm happy, I proceed with a smooth Round brush with about 40% Opacity to add more smoke to the entire scene.

Now I'm using the filter Add Noise (Filter > Add Noise) to emphasis more dust particles in the

environment. I also apply this particular filter to the smoke that comes out from the ship engines. You should be really careful when applying noise to an image, don't exaggerate the filter as it will ruin the image or lose the effect that you originally wanted.

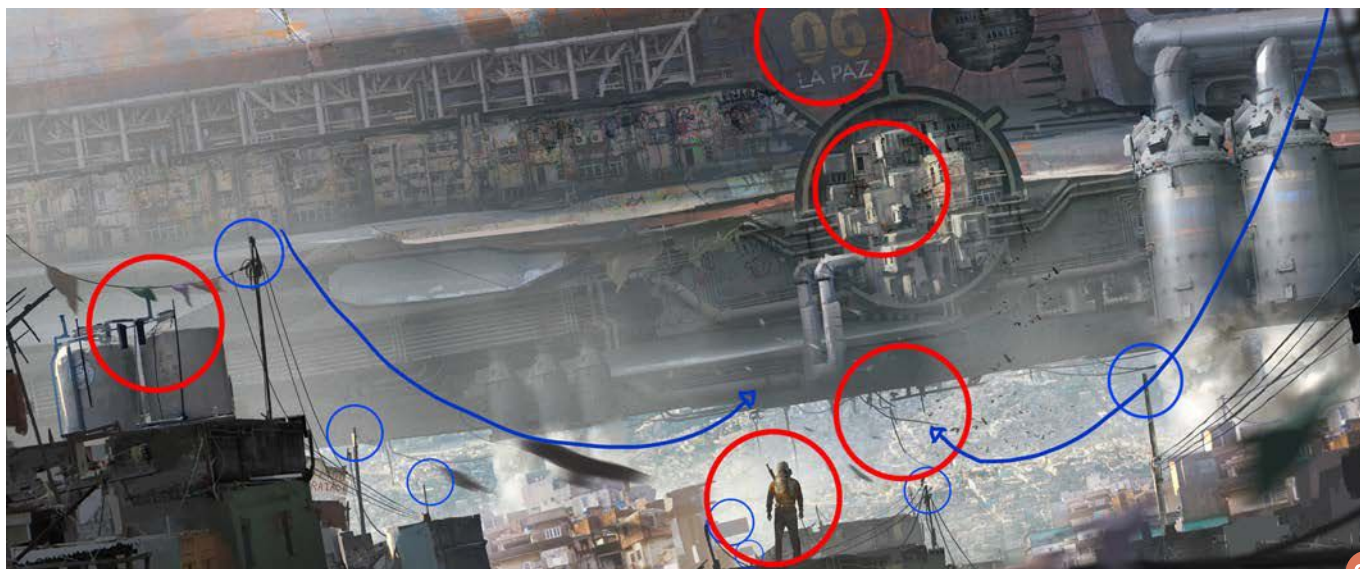
08 Foregrounds: In this stage, I focus on combining textures and color to the ▶

05 Blending the textures by using a Layer Mask to give the ship a realistic aspect

06 I add elements such as front of buildings and networks of tubes to enhance the vehicle and to generate more realism

07 I work on the smoke and dust that will pollute the scene

08 I start to use repetition to add a sense of depth and scale to the scene



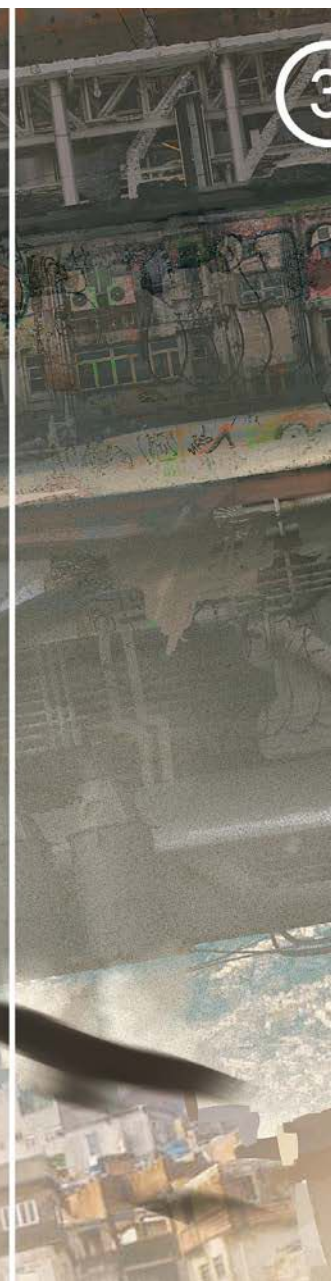
houses and balconies in the foreground. To do that, I'm doing exactly the same process that I did with the ship and the background – integrating textures, extracting interesting elements from the pictures such as cables and walls. Remember to adjust the color and lighting of every element to

keep the color coherence and the overall mood of the scene.

I draw a group of houses and buildings with a wide range of colors to add a little bit of detail to the image. Those new elements are located

in different planes to get a sense of depth and scale. Repetition will give the illusion that those elements vanish into the horizon.

09 Detail and enhancing: Now, it's just about adding more and more detail to



the scene. I need to create and polish the zones that don't have any sort of detail (such as the houses that surround the ship). It's important to be consistent in terms of the light direction, and to take advantage of new elements (such as cables and street lamps). If I arrange them logically, it helps me to draw the viewer's attention to the focal point.

Small pipes placed in the bottom of the ship near the center of interest, the logo, and some infographics are subtle details to enhance the scene and contribute with the realistic look that I want to achieve.

“It's important to be consistent in terms of the light direction, and to take advantage of new elements”

I'm also working on the character, adding detail to his clothes; working on the volume and lighting to make him more convincing. As a human element, the character provides a strong anchor

point where the viewer creates a link between him and the image. So, I want the character to look at the ship and this, instantaneously, draws attention directly to the focal point.

10 Final effects: Once the image is done in terms of detail, it's time to apply some filters and final adjustments. You can see every stage of the final effects in image 10.

At this point the image looks acceptable, but I want to reinforce the detail and realism, so I apply a color correction and add some adjustments (section 1).

I'm using the Color Balance tool for the color correction and to add a warmer color in the middle tones and a cold tone to the shadows to reinforce the ambient lighting effect even more (section 2).

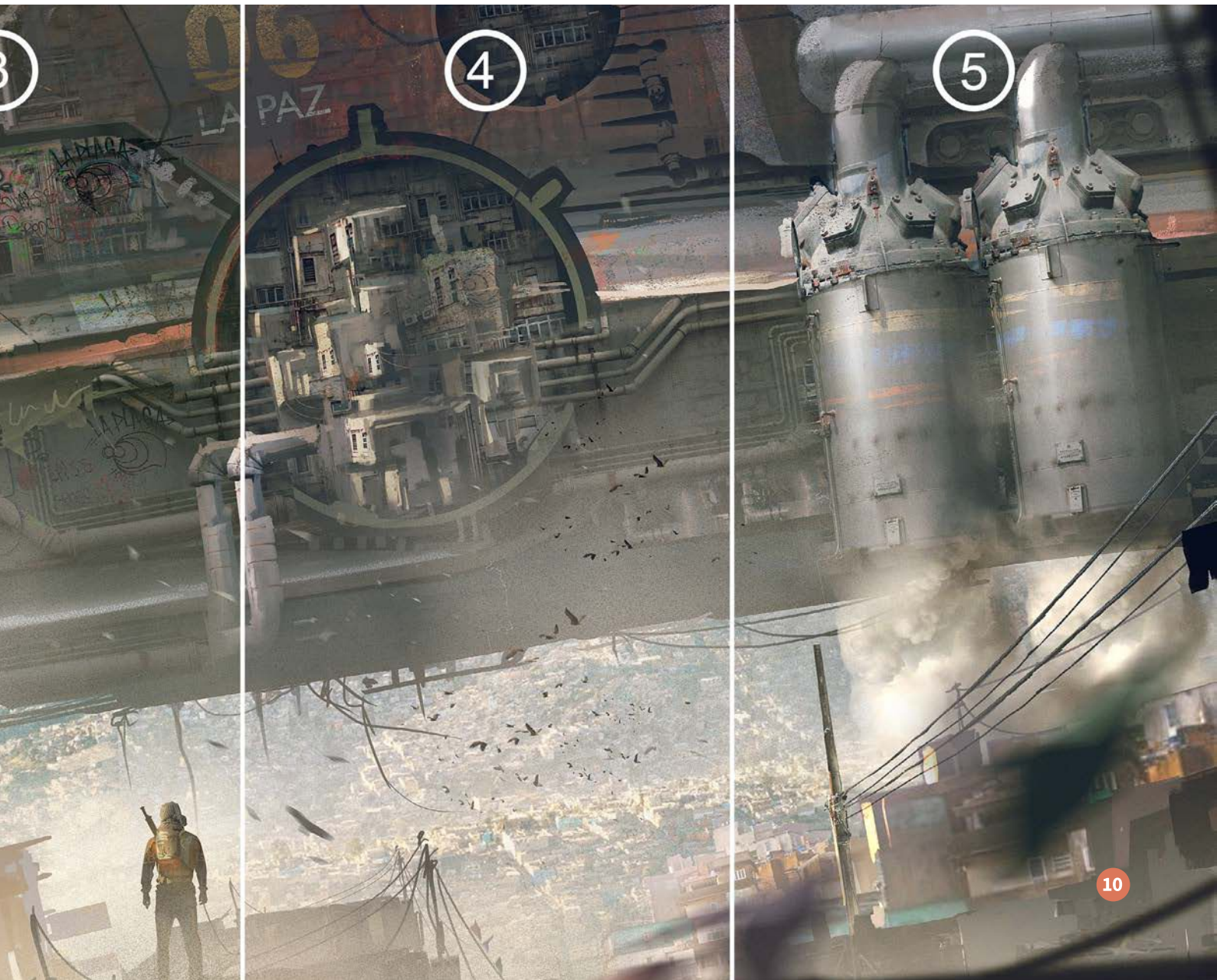
Smart sharpen is an awesome tool that I use to make the details stand out and define the image (section 3).

I create a new layer on top of the merged image filled with a dark solid blue, with the blending mode set to Lighten and about 30% Opacity. This trick is to get rid of any pure black elements in the shadows by giving them a bluish tone to them (section 4).

Finally, I create another layer on top of everything with a neutral gray tone. Then go to Filter > Filter Gallery > Grain. I set this blending mode to Soft Light with 30% Opacity. This provides the image with a natural and subtle grain with an interesting variety of colors (section 5). ●

09 I work on polishing and adding final details to the scene

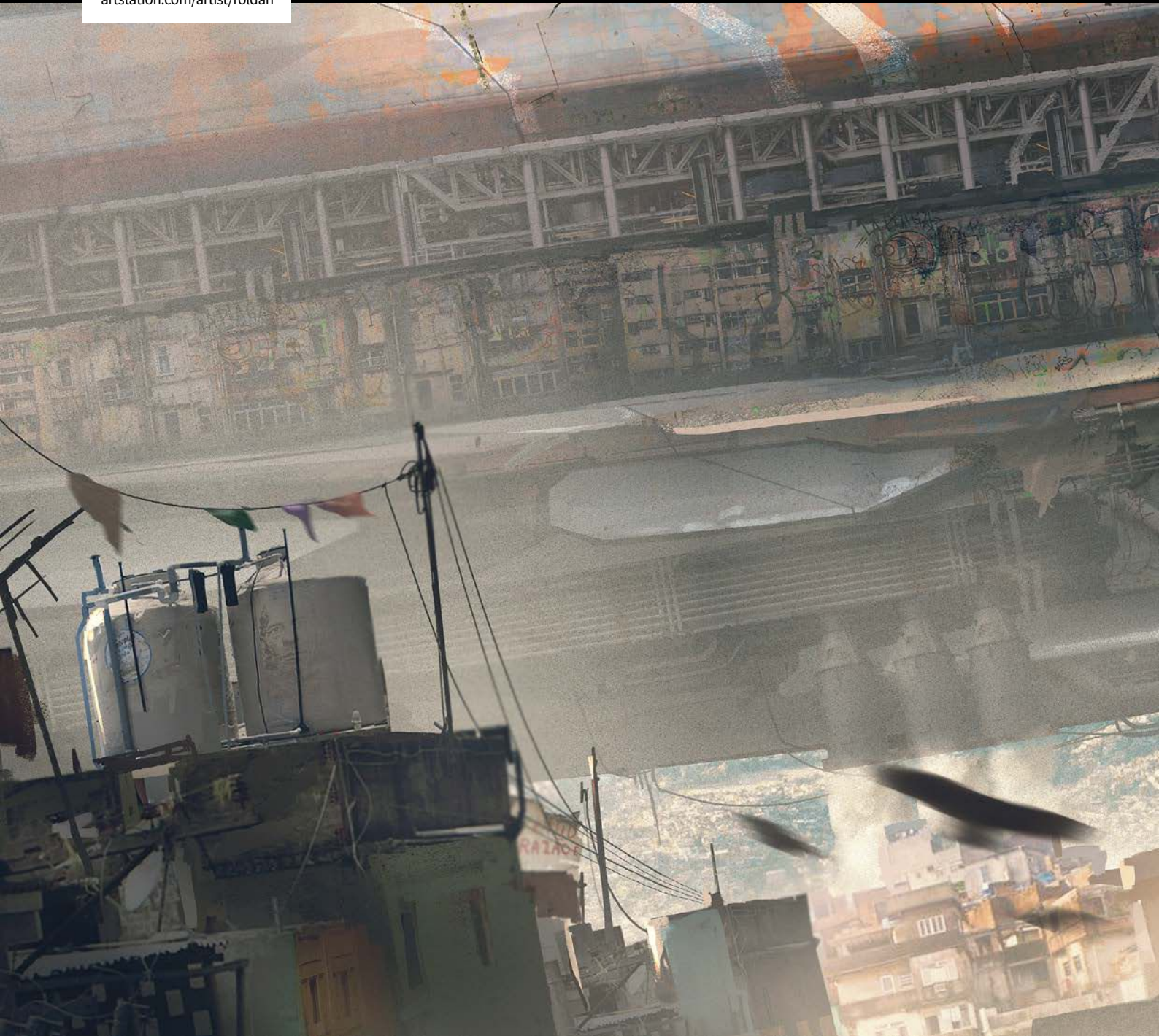
10 I'm applying some useful tricks and effects that will provide the image with an interesting look

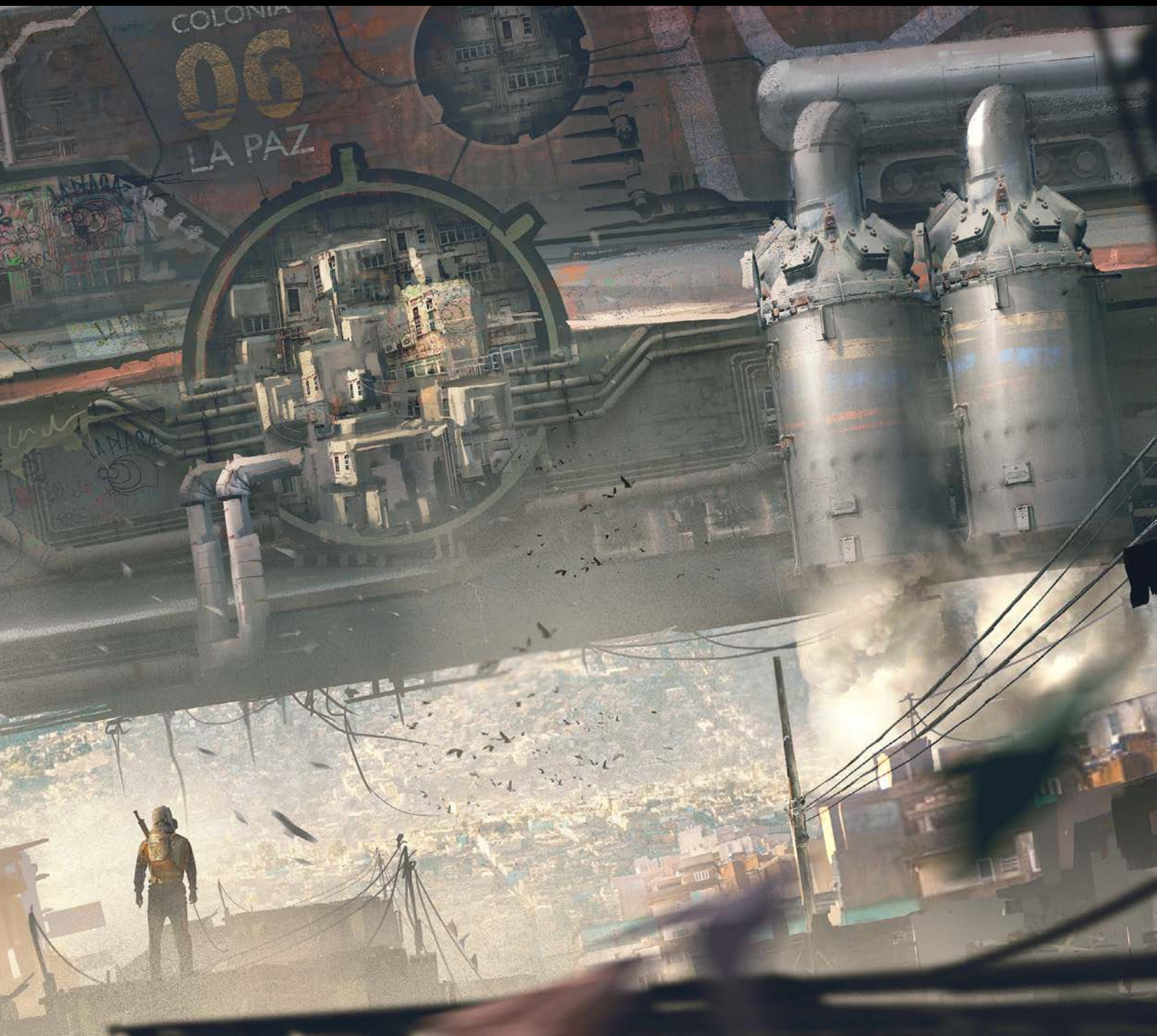


The Artist



Juan Pablo Roldan
artstation.com/artist/roldan





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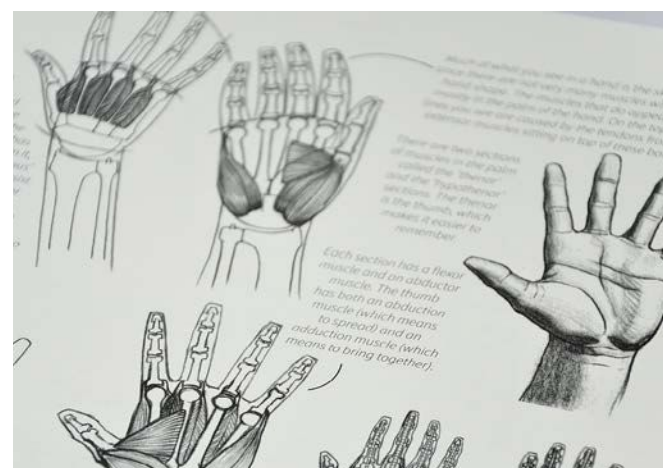
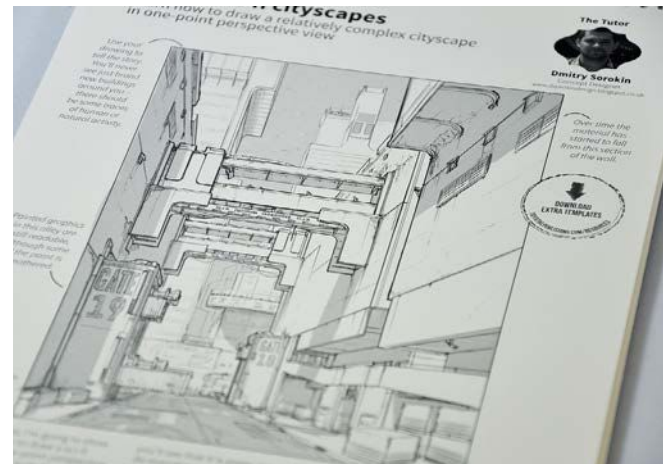
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CREATE A SCENE OF **EPIC PROPORTIONS**

Juan Pablo Roldan shares invaluable techniques for creating a large scale sci-fi scene

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“These tutorials not only provide interesting exercises for the beginner to help build a strong foundation for drawing and painting, but also provide important insights into the mindset of a concept artist. Very useful and inspiring!”

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Digital concept artist & animator | loish.net

beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop® characters

Following on from the highly successful *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop*, this latest title explores the popular techniques used in character design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting: Characters is a comprehensive guide for artists wishing to create convincing and detailed characters. It features established artists such as Charlie Bowater (concept artist at Atomhawk) and Derek Stenning (freelance concept artist and illustrator, with clients including Marvel Entertainment and Nintendo) who share their industry experiences by covering such aspects as posing characters, choosing the correct costumes, conveying emotions, and creating suitable moods.

Comprehensive step-by-step instructions – plus a quick tips section demonstrating how to paint elements that are integral to character design and a glossary covering essential Photoshop tools – make this an invaluable resource for those looking to learn new skills, as well as those pursuing the next level.

Image by **Kerim Ekal** (www.kerimekal.com)

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The Artist



Jessica Rossier
jess-studio.com

Software Used:
CINEMA 4D, Photoshop

Jessica Rossier is based in France. She mostly works for films, videogames, or advertising companies by providing high-quality visual assets, as a concept artist and matte painter. Since 2008, Jessica has worked with Bastien Grivet, and in 2013 they launched WARDENLIGHT studio in Montpellier.

Alter an environment's atmosphere

Learn how to change the ambiance and weather conditions of a matte painting using Photoshop with this step-by-step guide 

Use these simple techniques to alter the mood of your scene...

In this step-by-step tutorial, I'll show you how to change the atmosphere and weather conditions using matte painting techniques. You will learn how to use new photo materials in order to have very beautiful bad weather in your image, how to blend all your colors with the new atmosphere, and create wet reflections on the ground. In order to do this tutorial correctly, you will need Photoshop (at least from CS6 version) and, if possible, a Wacom Tablet.

01 Create a neutral scene: In the area of concept art and matte painting, clients often ask that we propose different atmospheres of light and shade in the same shot. To do that, I start by opening the main file with Photoshop. Once opened, I remove the atmosphere layers from the image to make it as neutral as possible.

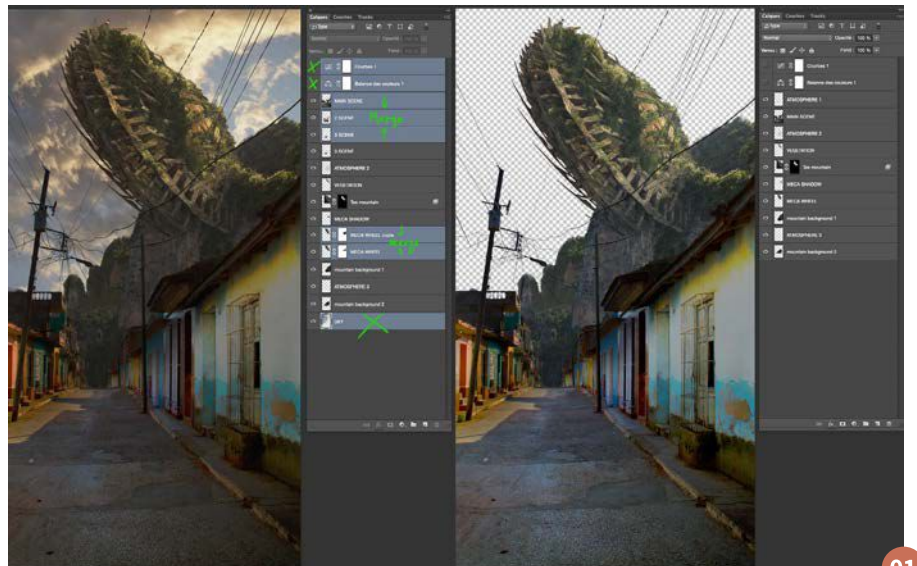
First, I hide my two effects layers that are at the top of my layers (I don't erase them because they can be useful later). Then, I remove layers that are not needed anymore. Now, I merge the layers that I think I no longer need to keep independent. When all is done, my scene is neutral and ready to receive new items.

"The first element that I will add into my neutral scene is a new sky. This will establish the base of the new atmosphere"

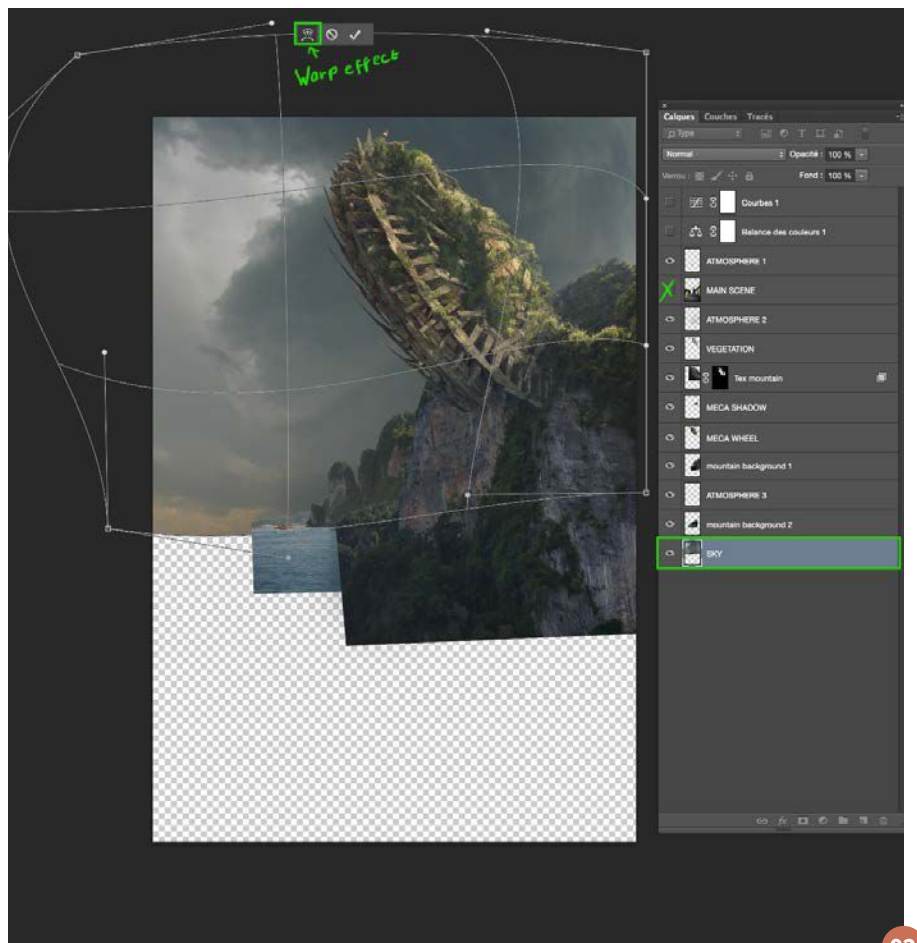
02 Apply a new background for the new ambiance: The first element that I will add into my neutral scene is a new sky. This will establish the base of the new atmosphere. I take the stormy cloud photo (you can use a photo from your own library or from free sites such as cgtextures.com or freetextures.3dtotal.com) and I place it on the SKY layer below all other layers. Now, I hide the layer MAIN SCENE so I can see the sky better, making working on it easier.

I then select the Warp tool from the Transform menu (Edit > Transform > Warp) to change the shape of my sky. Once I am happy with the changes I press enter to validate the effect. At this point I check the box next to the MAIN SCENE layer to reactivate the layers visibility.

03 Change the element's colors: Now that my new sky is set up, I change the colors and light of all the other elements that are in my scene, so that they match the atmosphere of the new background.



01



02

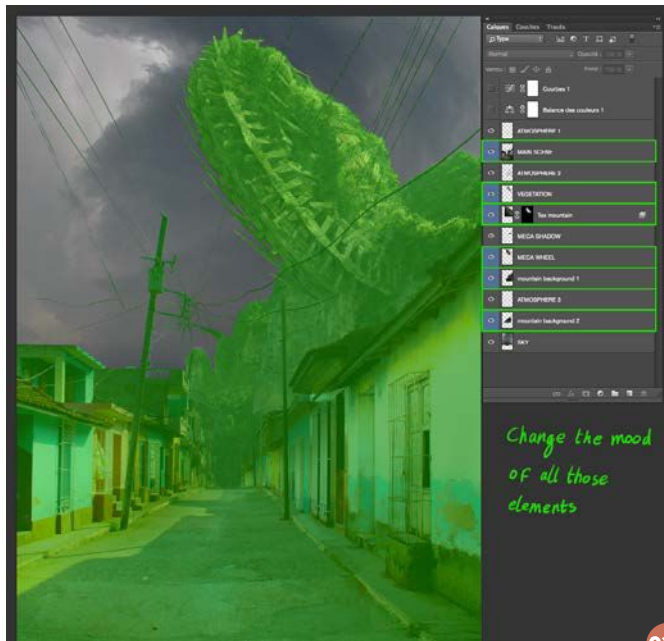
To make the color change, I use Photoshop's match color command, which matches colors between different images, as well as between multiple layers and selections.

For this I need a color reference image, so I find an image which matches the moody atmosphere of the background sky, and I import it into my scene. As I am only using this image as a color reference, I don't need it to be visible, so I click on the eye icon next to the layer to hide it.

To change the Hue, select the layer that you want to change (for example, mountain background 2). Then go to Image > Adjustments > Match Color and in the Source drop-down menu, I select the file I am working on. Still in the Match Color menu ▶

01 Remove the existing atmosphere to prepare the image

02 Adding in the new sky



03a



03b

panel, I go to the Layer drop-down menu and select the layer which contains the image I am using for the color reference (REF COLOR). Once done, the mountain background 2 layer's shades will have been altered.

Now I use the Luminance, Color Intensity and Fade sliders to achieve the result that suits me the best, and then I click OK. I repeat the same action for all the other elements in my scene.

04 Erase the sun: Now that all my items are in the correct hue, I remove the sunny area on the left-hand side of the foreground image (MAIN SCENE).

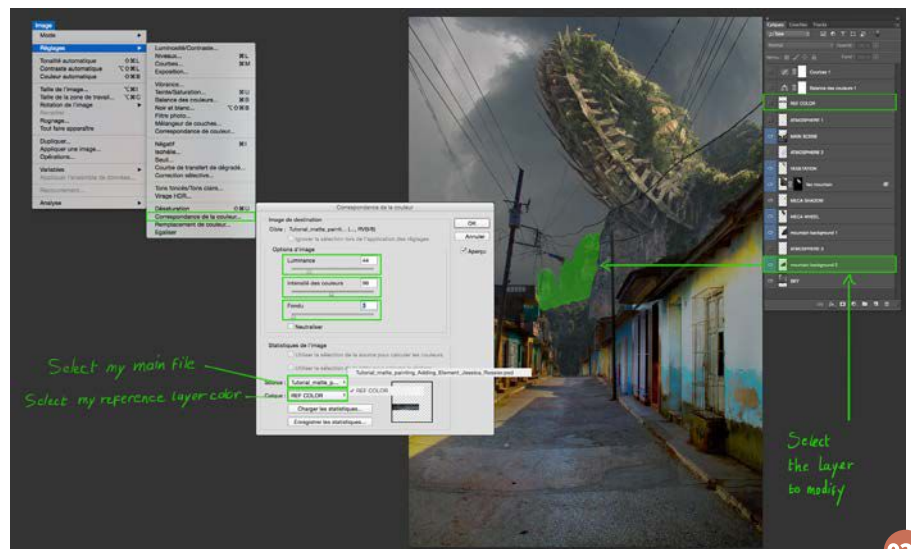
To do this I create a copy of the layer 'MAIN SCENE'. I go on to this new layer (MAIN SCENE copy) and desaturate and darken it with the Hue/Saturation tool – then I press OK. Finally, I add some darkness with the Curve tool.

Now I'm going to erase the right side of my layer 'MAIN SCENE copy' to keep only the sunny side that has been darkened. This will allow me to balance the light/dark areas. So I create a mask on my layer (with the layer selected click the icon at the bottom of the layers panel indicated in image 04c) and I paint on it with a Soft brush to erase the dark areas.

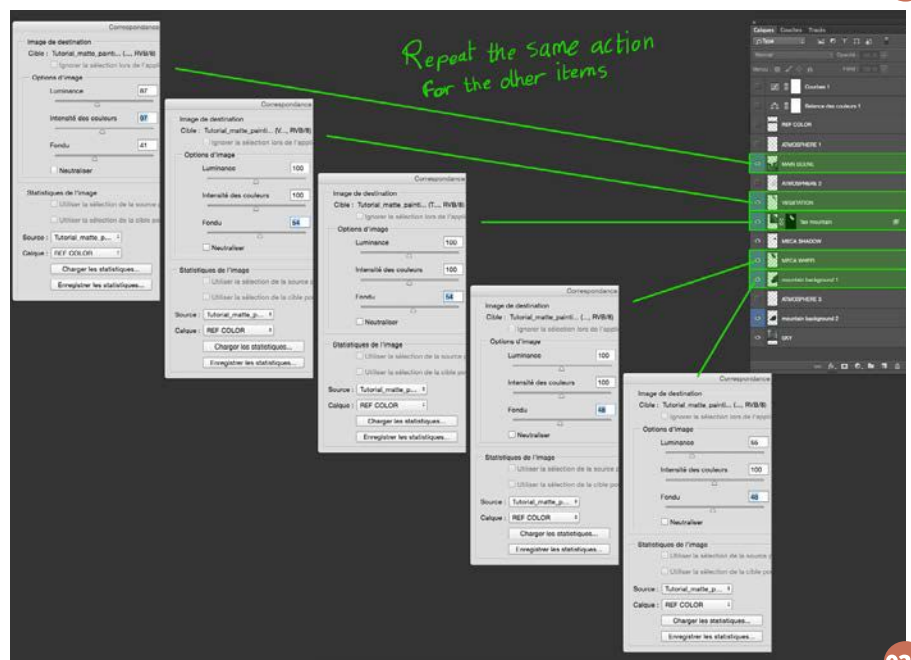
05 Add a photo material to the floor:

Now that I've got good attenuation of my sunlight, I want to create a wet atmosphere in my image. To give the floor a wet effect, I will use a photo.

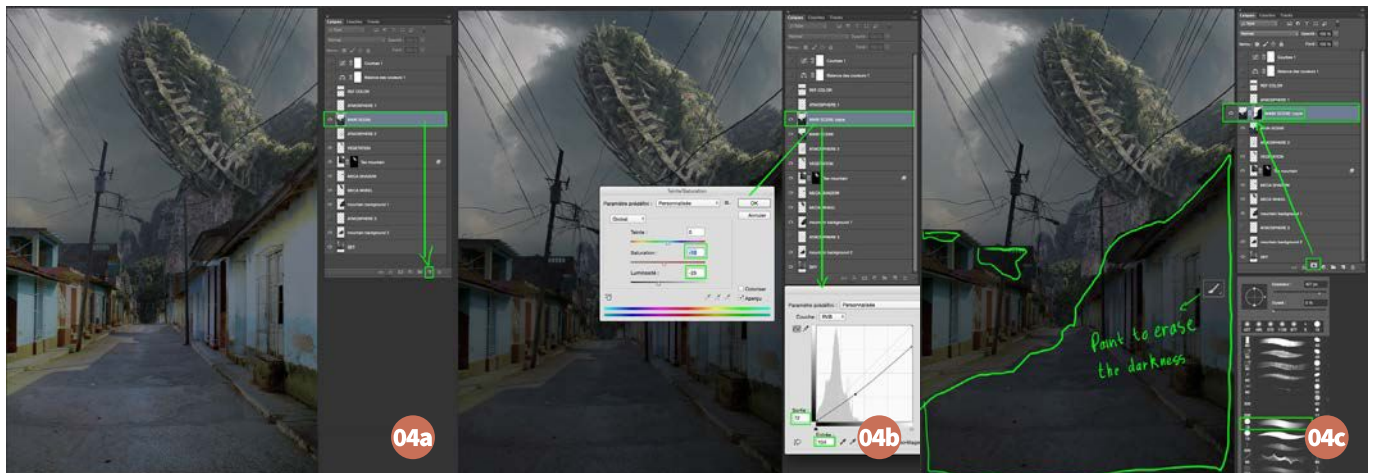
First, I import the wet floor photo into my scene on a new layer. I put the new layer (WET FLOOR)



03c



03d



above the main layer (MAIN SCENE copy). I then modify the shape of this image using the Free Transform tool to make it fit the perspective correctly. Finally, using the Polygonal Lasso tool, I cut the image down to fit the shape of the street image underneath.

The areas that interest me in this new flooring are the puddles of water; the rest must disappear. To achieve this, I use the Layer Style menu. I double-click on the layer WET FLOOR and the Layer Style menu window opens. In the Blending Options menu, I drag the cursors on the Blend If: Gray sliders so that they blend the top layer with the layer underneath.

As soon as I achieve a good integration, I click OK to confirm. Then I take the Eraser tool, and with a Soft brush, erase the parts that appear too bright and poorly integrated.

06 Reflection: Now I want to create a reflection of the scene in the water puddles. I start by duplicating the entire scene. A little trick to do this quickly is Ctrl + A, Ctrl + Shift + C then Ctrl + B, and I have a duplication of my scene. Now I flip the image on the new layer ▶



03a The selection of elements that need color adjustments

04b Using Hue/Saturation and Curves to remove the sun area

03b Import the color reference image

04c Softening the dark areas to create balance between light and dark

03c Change the elements color

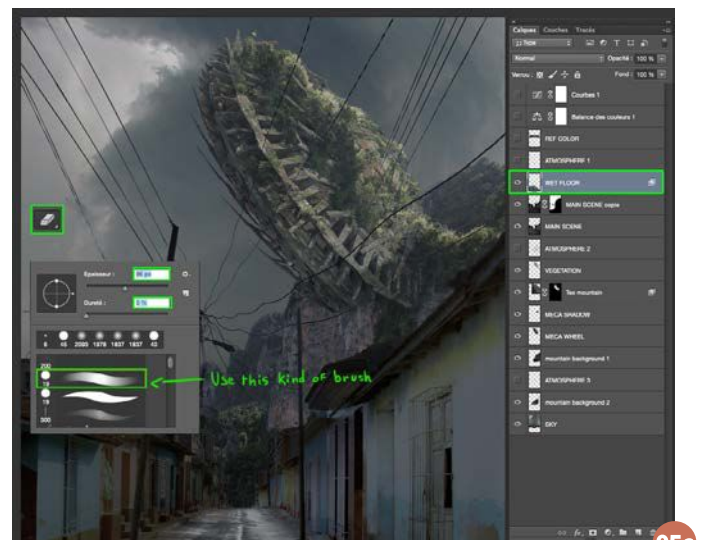
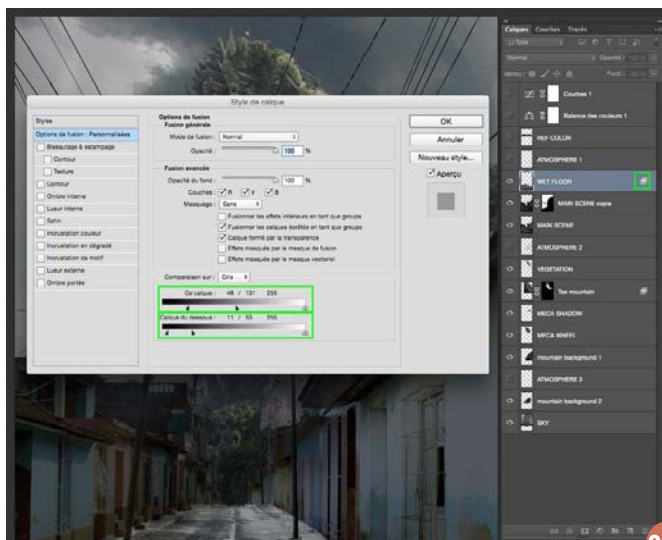
05a Adding a wet floor texture using a photo

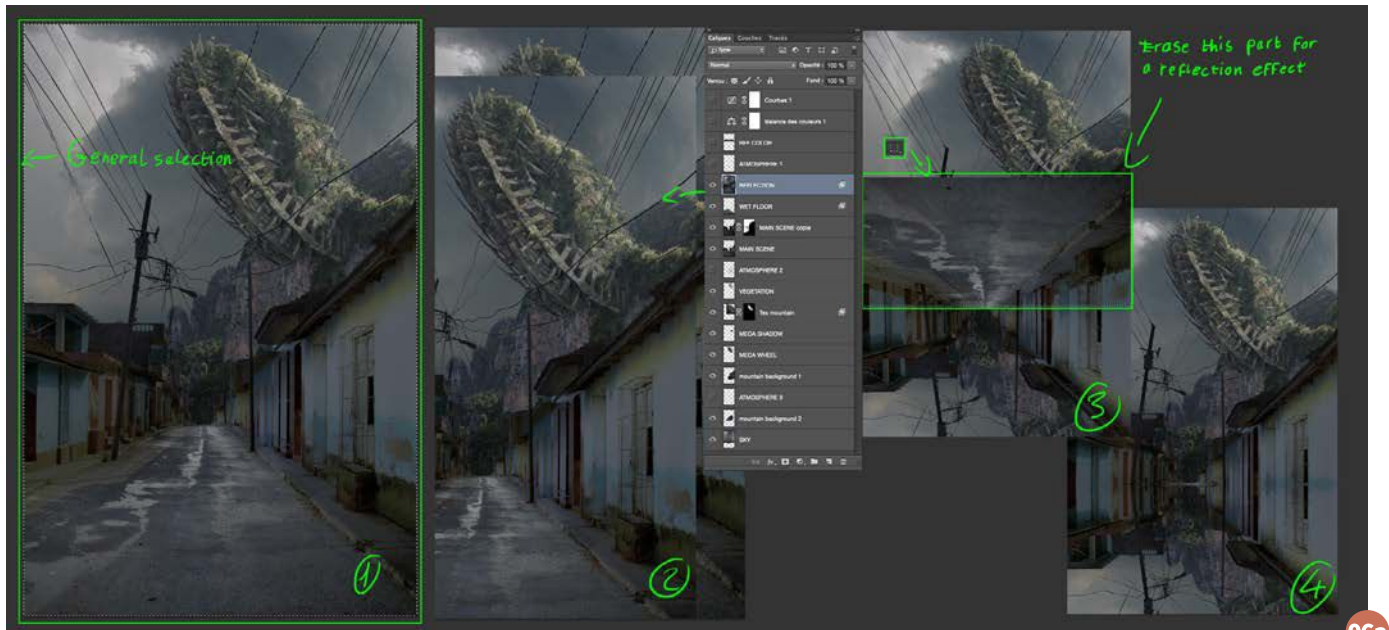
03d The color settings and changes for the remaining layers

05b Integrate the images with Layer Styles

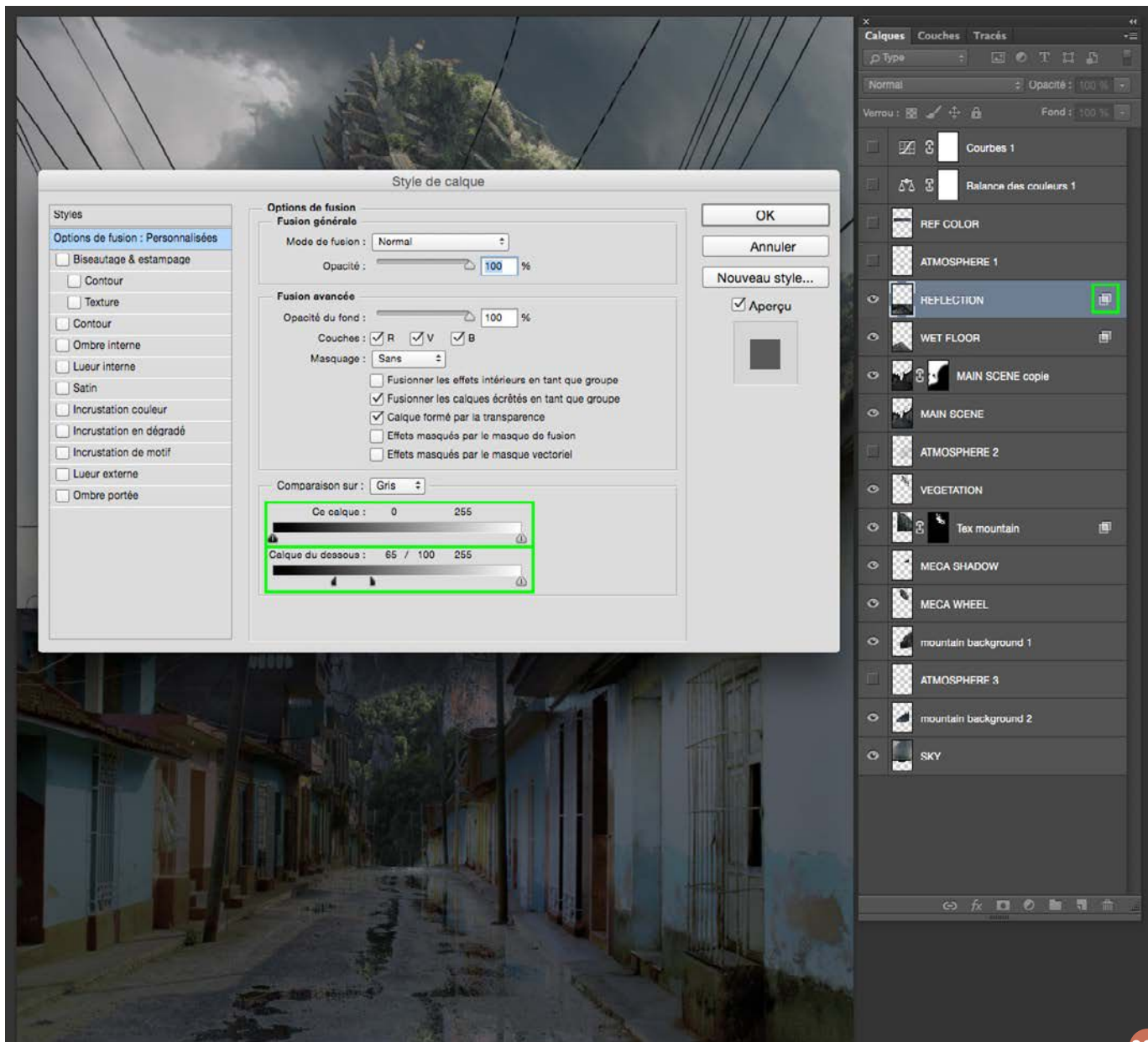
04a Select the layer and drag it to the New Layer icon

05c Erase unwanted details on the wet floor





06a



06b

vertically (Image > Transform > Flip Vertical). I select the upper part of the image (all the ground area) and I delete it, to create a reflection effect.

Then to integrate the reflection in the water puddles, I use the Layer Style menu again by double-clicking on the reflection layer. I move the sliders in the Blend If: Gray menu until the integration works.

07 **Add a few more details:** I want to give the impression that the buildings have been abandoned for quite a while, so I start with some more photo textures for this part by importing them into my scene. With the Free Transform tool, I change the perspective of the material to match with the perspective of the buildings. Then I set my layer to Soft Light mode with the purpose of integrating the image with the item that is underneath.

Now I work on the details. I erase some areas of the wheel to make it look older. I paint over some areas on the floor of the foreground to remove what remains of the sunlight.

08 Altering the colors: When I have finished working all the details in my



scene, it's time to do some color corrections on the mountains in the background. To change the colors, I use the Color Balance adjustment

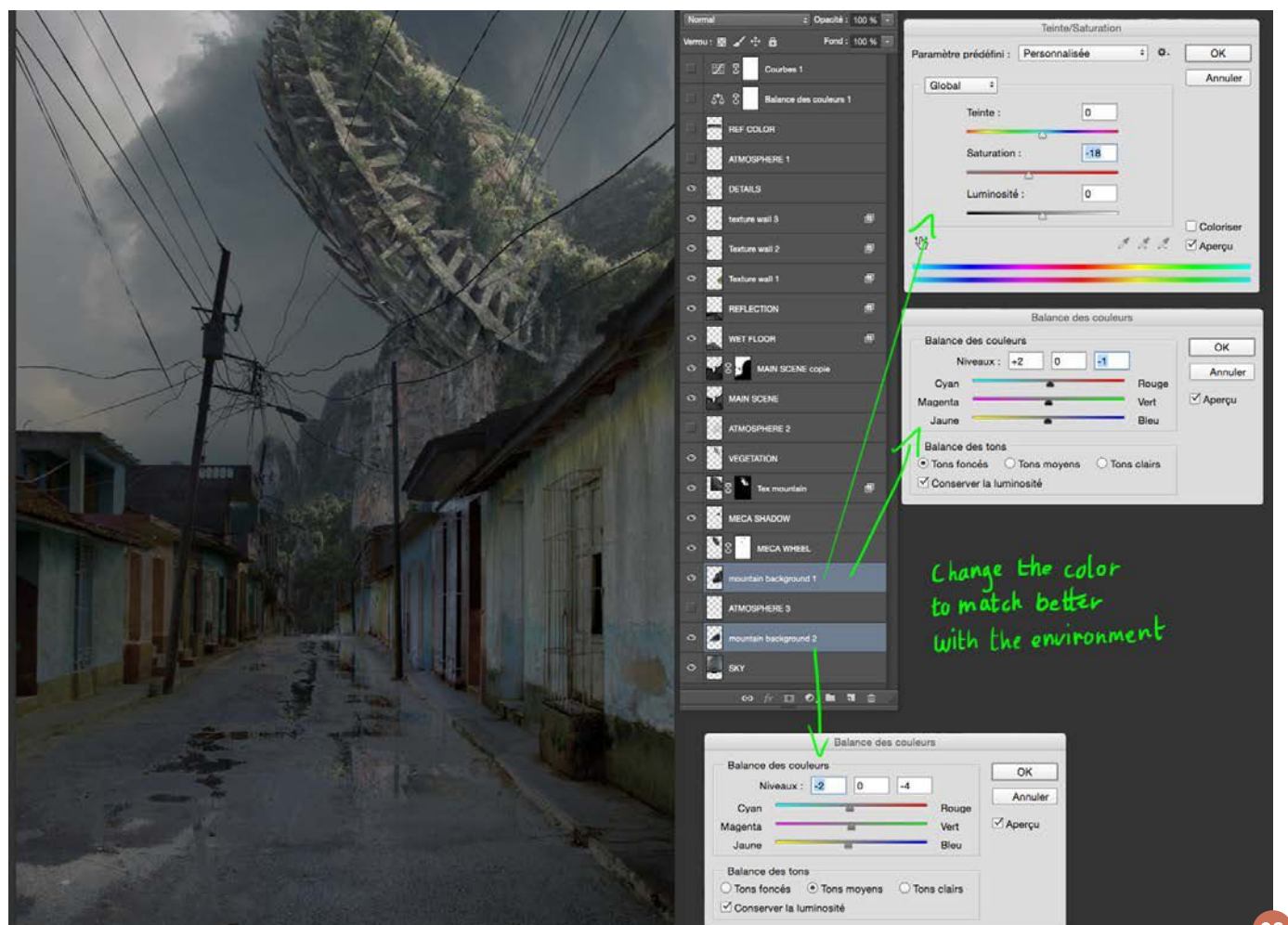
layer and I play with color sliders. If the colors are too strong, I use Hue/Saturation to lower the saturation and brightness as needed. ►

06a Duplicate the scene and make a vertical inversion

07 Add texture to the elements and create a few more aged details

06b Use the Layer Style menu to help integrate the reflection

08 Use adjustment layers to alter the images colors



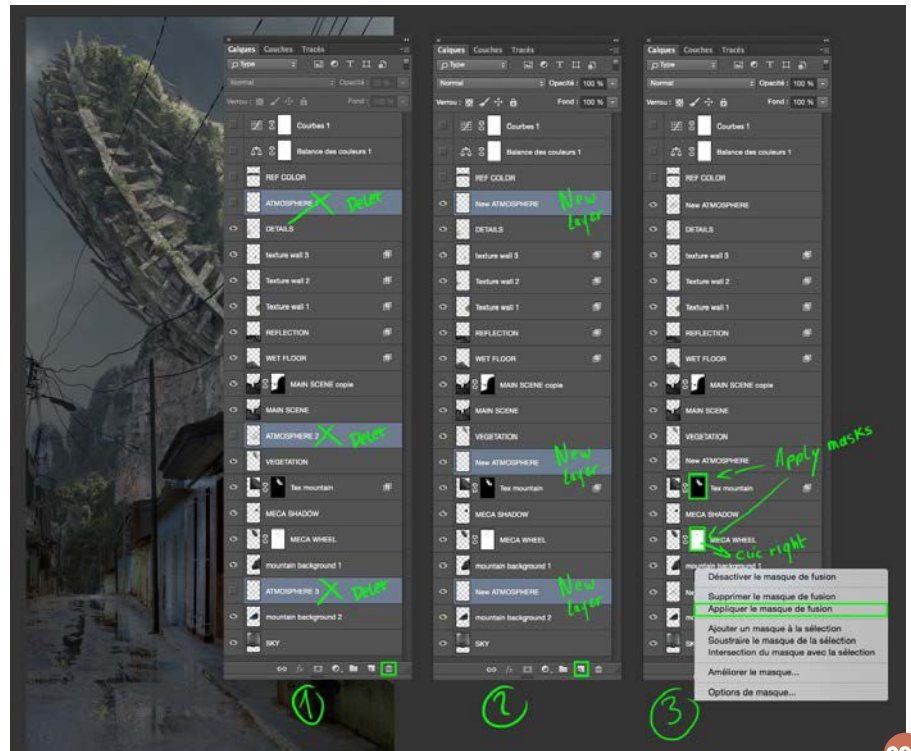
09 Create the atmosphere: When all these items are well integrated into the scene and my image is almost completed, I start the final step: setting up the atmospheric ambience.

Inspired by *Silent Hill*, I want to give my image a 'phantomatic' appearance. First, I put some order to the layers. I delete what is no longer needed, create new layers between the foreground, mid-ground and background where I will create my new atmosphere, and merge the masks.

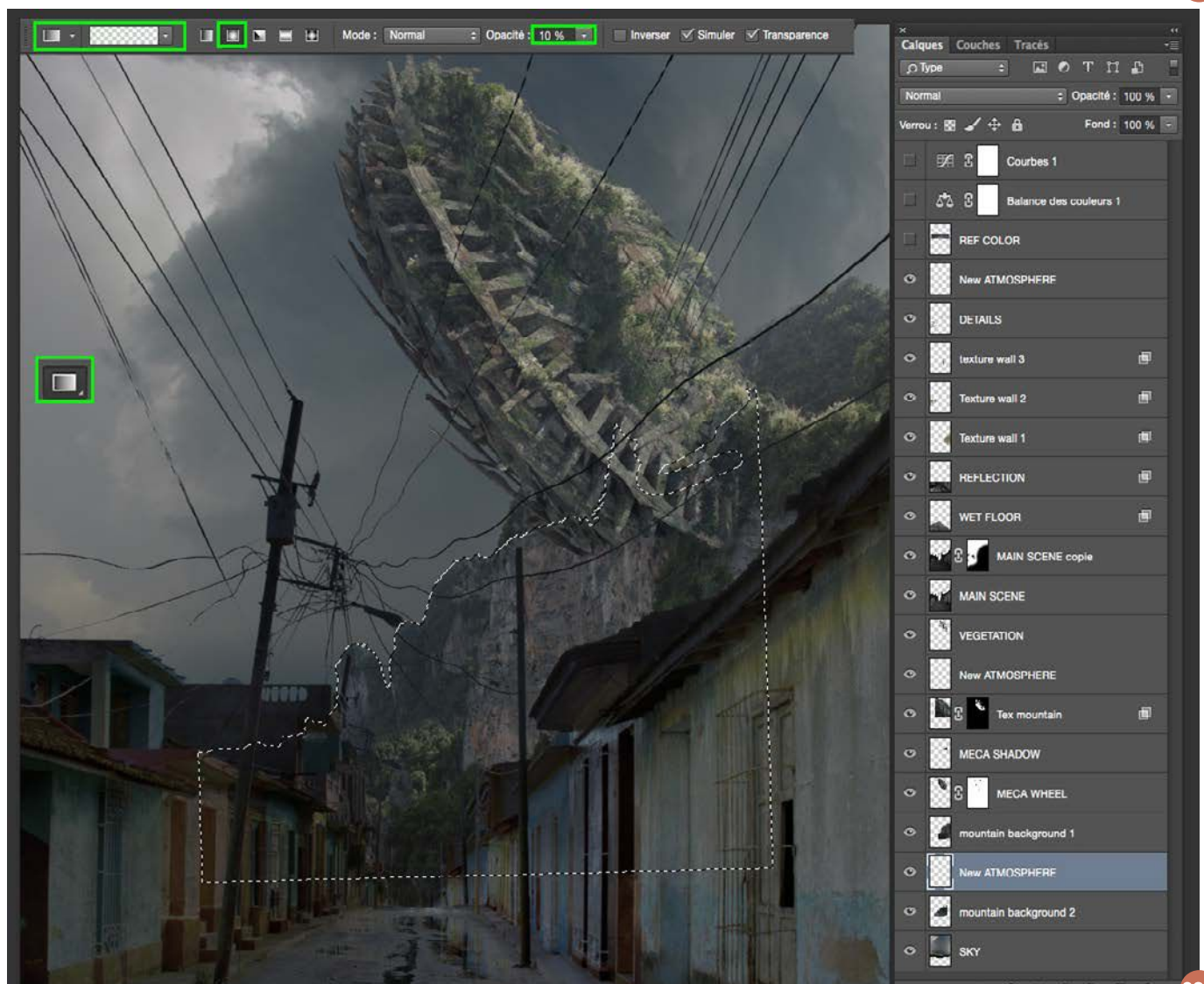
To do that I right-click on the mask and select Apply Layer Mask. Now that everything is in order, I create my atmosphere for each of the planes.

I start by selecting the background mountains while staying on my atmosphere layer that is above it.

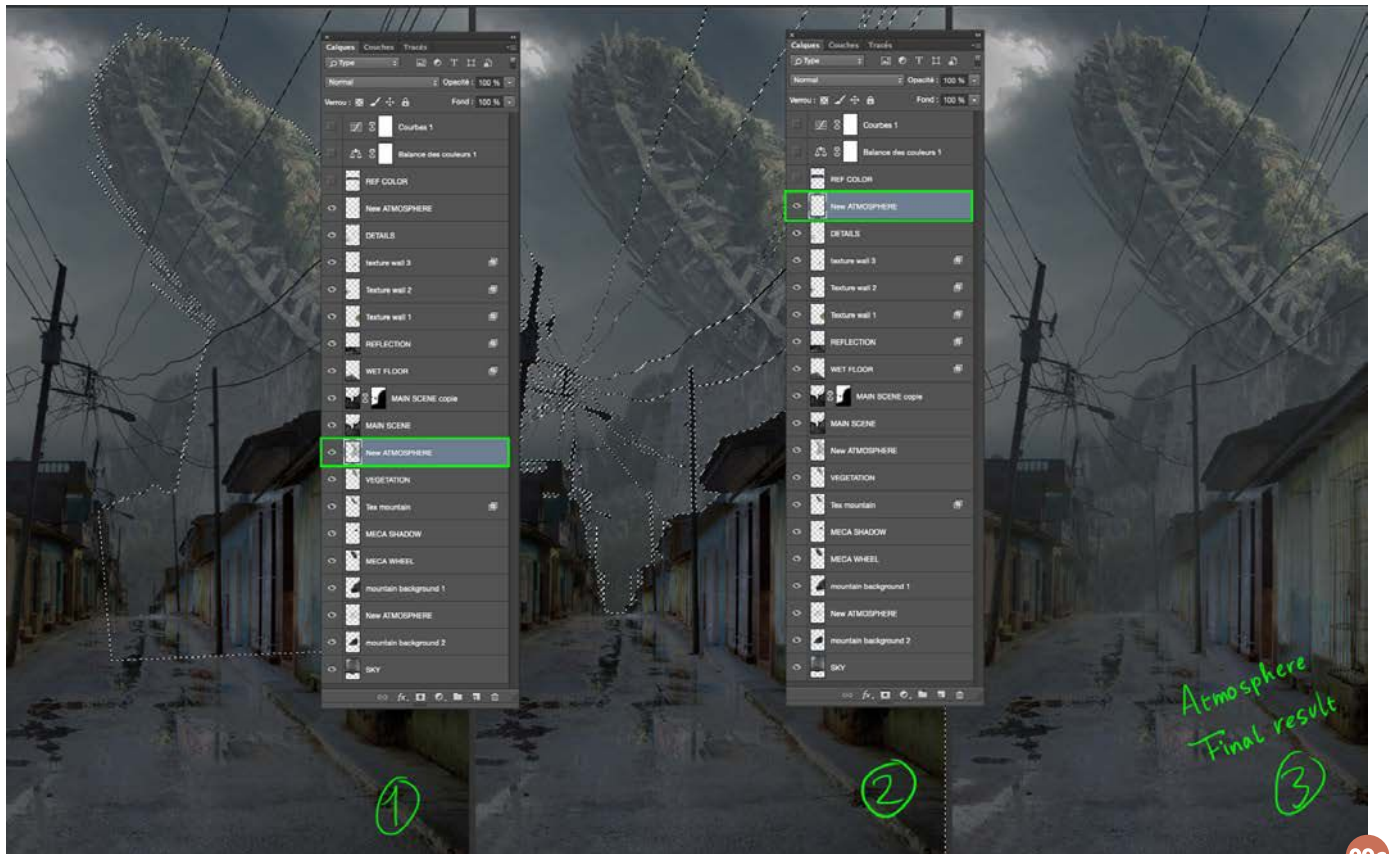
Now I take the Gradient tool (at 10% Opacity) and I create a gradient (in the same color as the sky) several times, from the bottom of the mountains



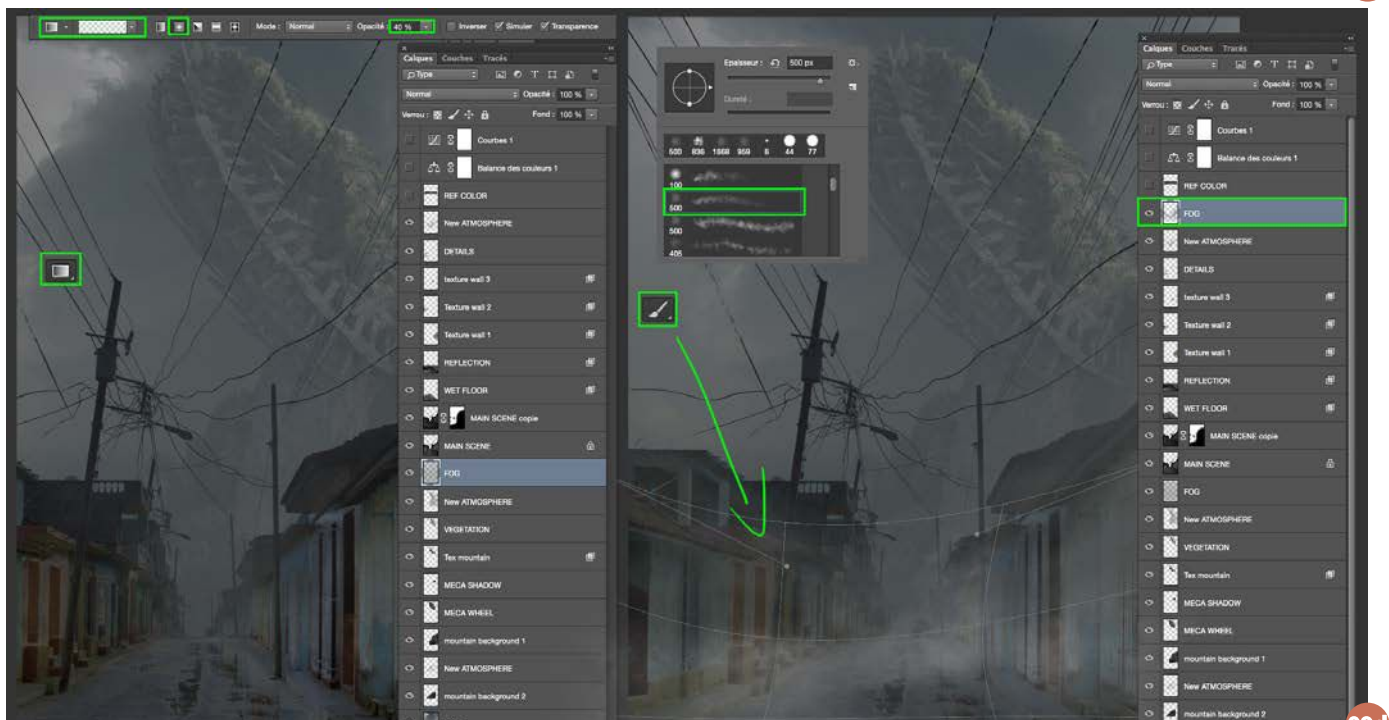
09a



09b



09c



09d

to the top. As soon as I get the atmospheric mood that suits me, I repeat the same action with the other two plans.

To improve the foggy mood, I create a new layer above the mountain layer that contains the wheel and create a gradient on the entire length of the scene from the bottom upwards. To finalize the ambiance, I use a Smoke brush to create a fog

effect in the foreground, and I use the Warp tool to distort and give a more dynamic effect.

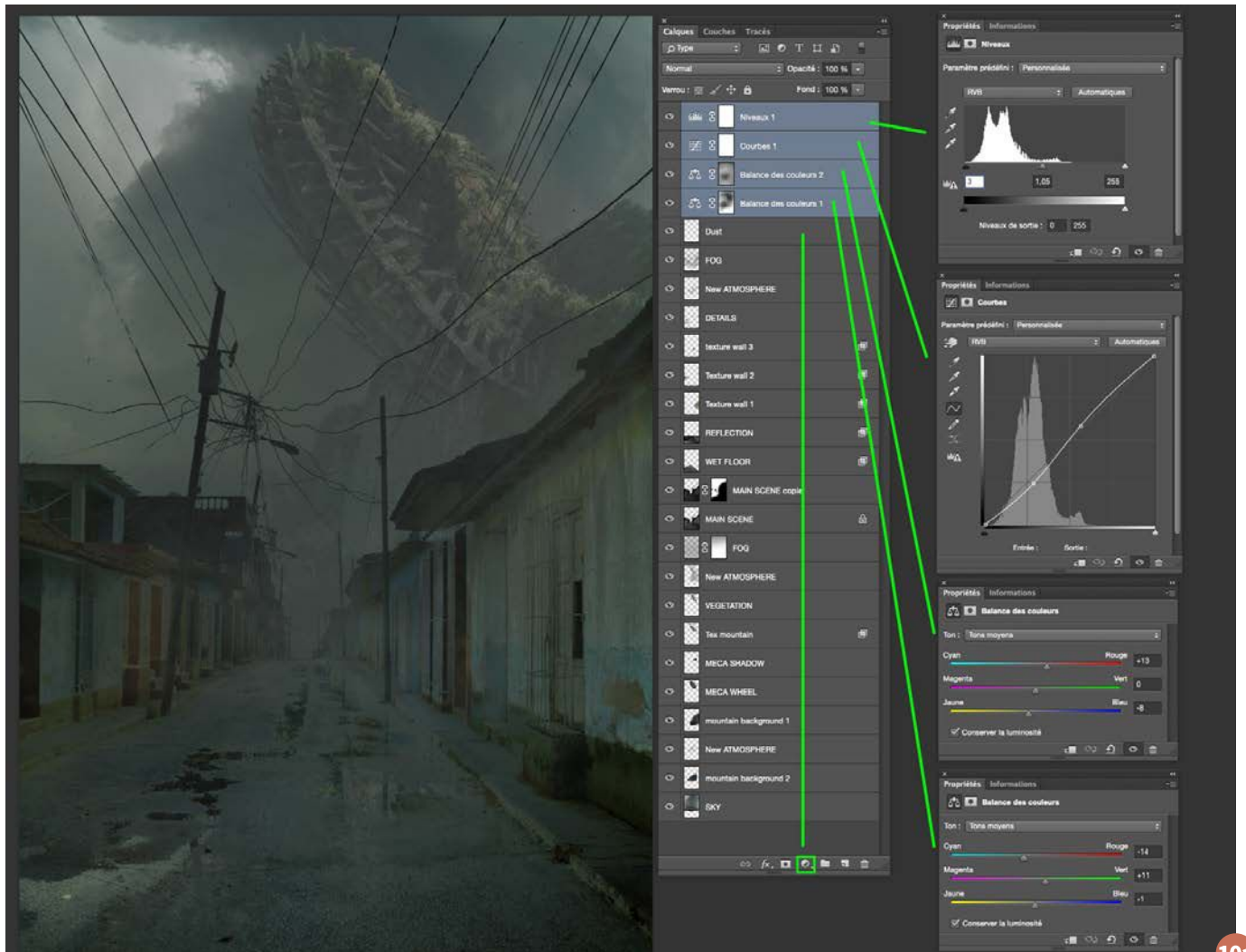
10 Final touch: In this last step, I create color moods and final lighting effects by using layer effects. I start with Color Balance and I pull on the green and yellow colors to give an eerie mood to strengthen the oppressive side of the ambiance. ▶

09a Ordering and tidying up the layers

09b Use the Gradient tool to create atmosphere

09c Repeat the process across the planes

09d Create a misty ambiance with the Gradient tool and a Smoke brush

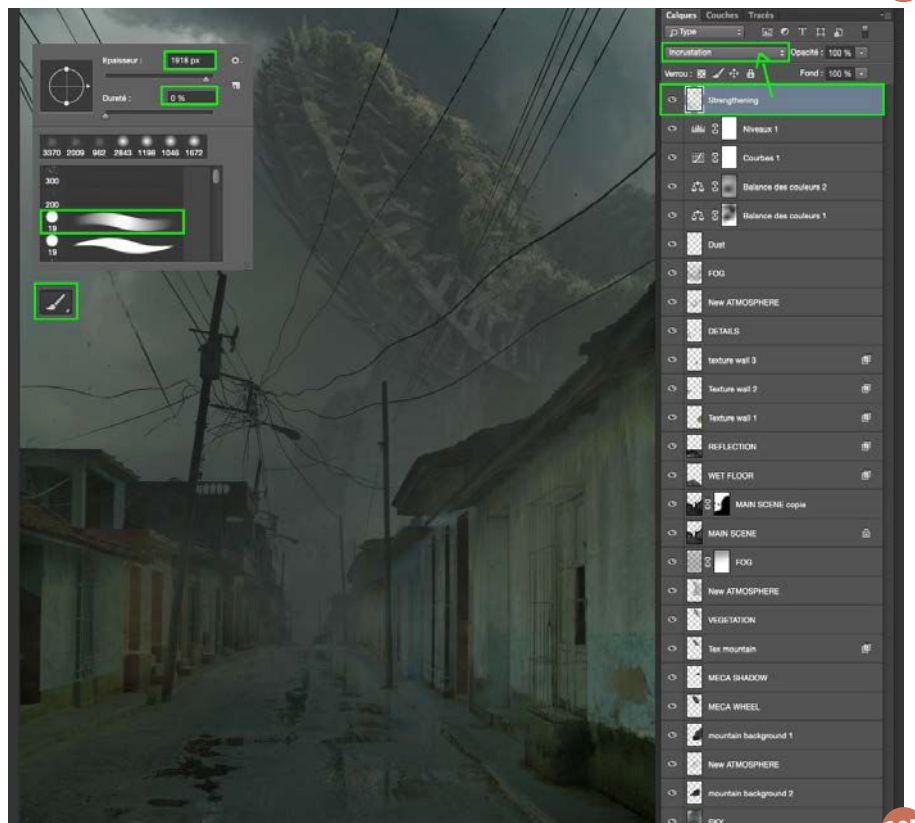


10a

In the mask layer, I erase some areas with the Gradient tool to provide color variations. Then I create a second Color Balance layer to push the color variations further. Play around with these sliders until you reach an effect that you like.

Now I create a Curves layer to play with the light and dark; finally I create a Levels layer to tweak the grayscale.

To finish off the image, I intensify the colors. A little trick for doing this is to create a new layer set to Overlay. Take your Brush tool – a big thick Soft brush – and paint in a dark blue color in the dark areas, and a light yellow in the brighter areas. ●



10b

10a Use different adjustment layers to create a creepy ambiance

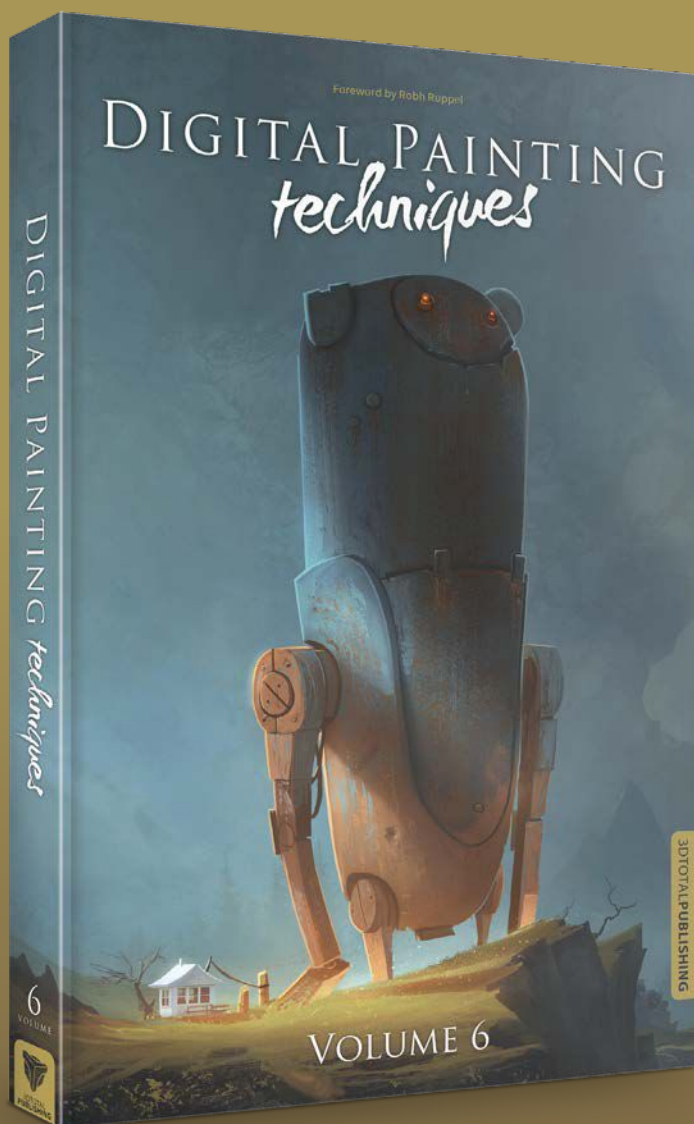
10b A technique to make your colors pop

The Artist



Jessica Rossier
jess-studio.com

DIGITAL PAINTING *techniques* VOLUME 6



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Now in its sixth year, *Digital Painting Techniques: Volume 6* continues the tradition of showcasing the latest digital painting trends and techniques, from industry experts including Carlos Cabrera (Applibot) and Jan Urschel (Assassin’s Creed IV: Black Flag). In this latest volume, artists will learn about the development of character moods, creating fantasy battles and environments, building sci-fi worlds, and the fundamental aspects of lighting and atmosphere, forming another great addition to any artist’s shelf.

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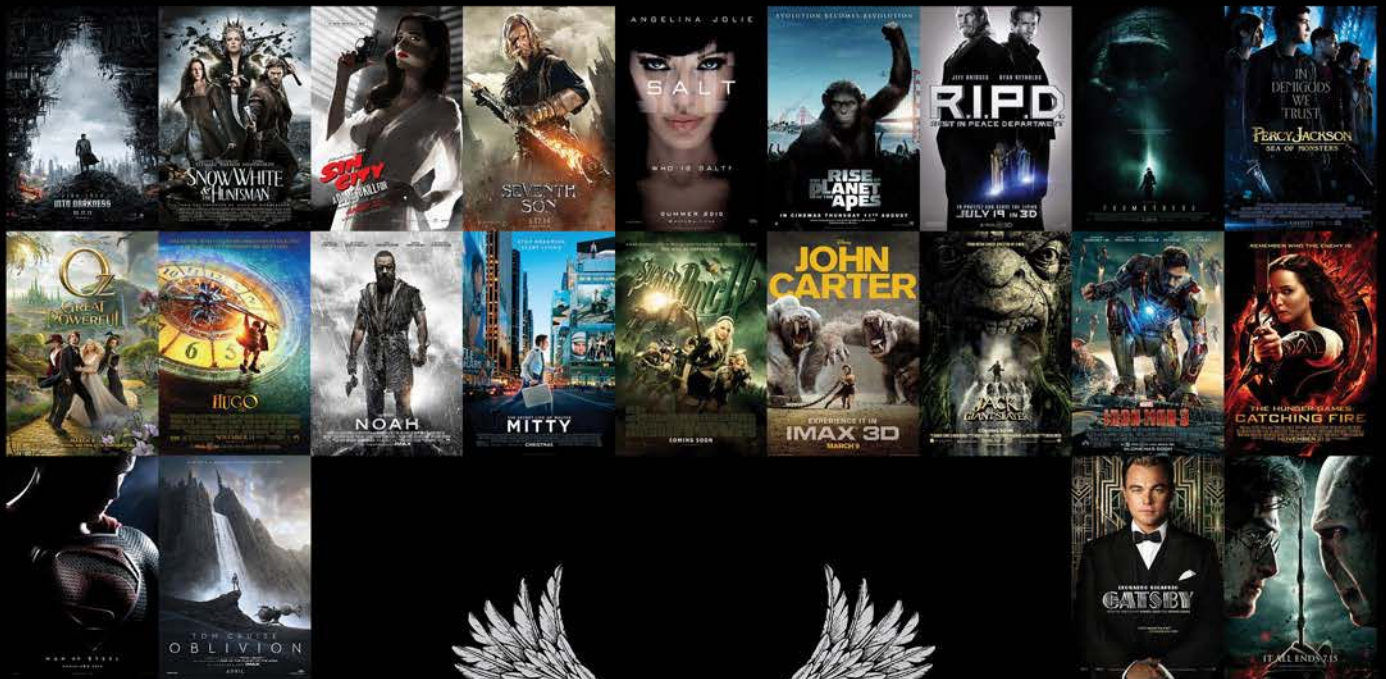
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The Artist



José Parodi

artstation.com/artist/parodi

Software Used:

Photoshop

Born in the Guajira Peninsula in Colombia, Parodi had a penchant for art since childhood. He saw how important discipline was to artistic development and used sport to aid him in this. Parodi began working in publishing houses, producing art for children's educational books, literary works and feature animated movies.

Paint a fantasy character

José Parodi shares the creative workflow behind his illustration *Hunter of Dragons*, which is inspired by the themes of fantasy and fiction ▶



PARODI

Discover the techniques behind José Parodi's fantasy dragon hunter character...

In the following tutorial I will share the process of creating one of my illustrations inspired by the themes of fantasy and fiction.

The character is designed with the following features in mind:

- Athletic
- Intelligent
- Skillful
- Dedicated to hunting dragons

I will briefly explain how I developed the character from a sketch, all the way to the final color, finishes and details. To achieve this character it is important to understand anatomy and above all have artistic skills such as traditional painting and drawing. Knowledge of digital painting in Photoshop is also needed.

01 **Sketch:** First I select a brush in Photoshop; you must adjust the brush

to feel comfortable for sketching (my favorite is the Round brush). I think it is very important for a good sketch to have a strong solid stroke which is achieved with practice.

I begin with a line sketch, exploring ways to define an ideal pose according to the features of the imagined character. At this point it doesn't matter how clean or detailed the sketch is, it's about getting the basic anatomy right.

02 **Grayscale:** In this step I start to fill in the values with a larger brush using grayscale; this helps to enhance the shape and create volume. Take into account lights and

shadows without losing the initial sketch. At this point the character has a good strong base to build upon.

03 **Anatomical definition:** This step is important because you must have a solid basis on which to build the character. We can ▶

01 It is important at this point to know some anatomy, visualize the character and choose a good brush for drawing

02 Use a coarse brush to create volume

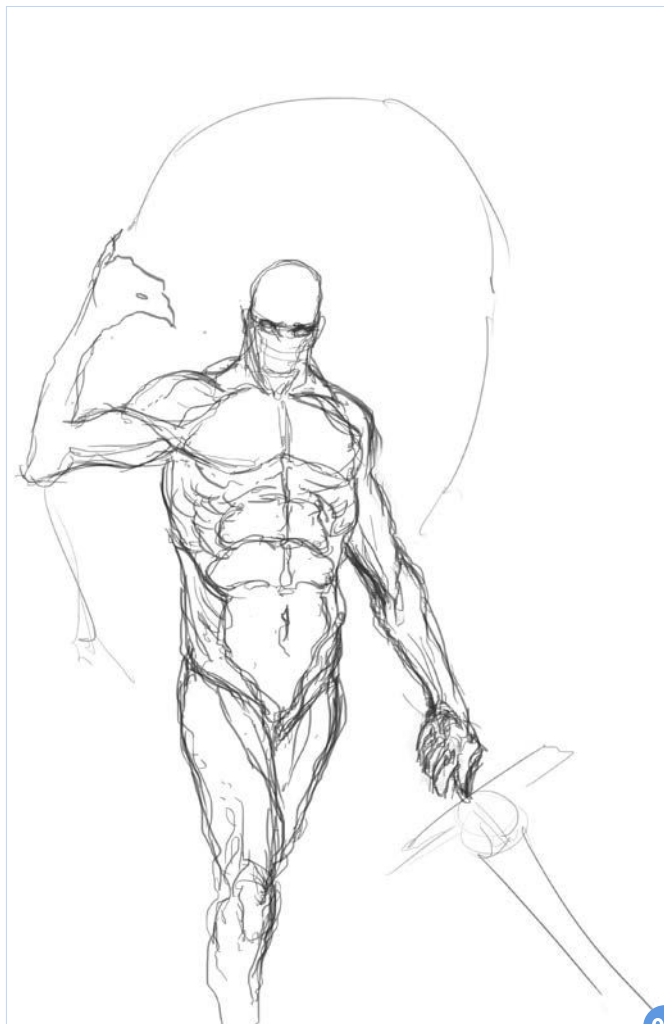
PRO TIPS

Accessories

Details such as accessories for a character can give an idea of what it could be. This makes it more credible and leads our imagination to a world with a culture and history behind it.

Contour light

The character is lit around the outline, this can help separate that character from a background which creates more depth.

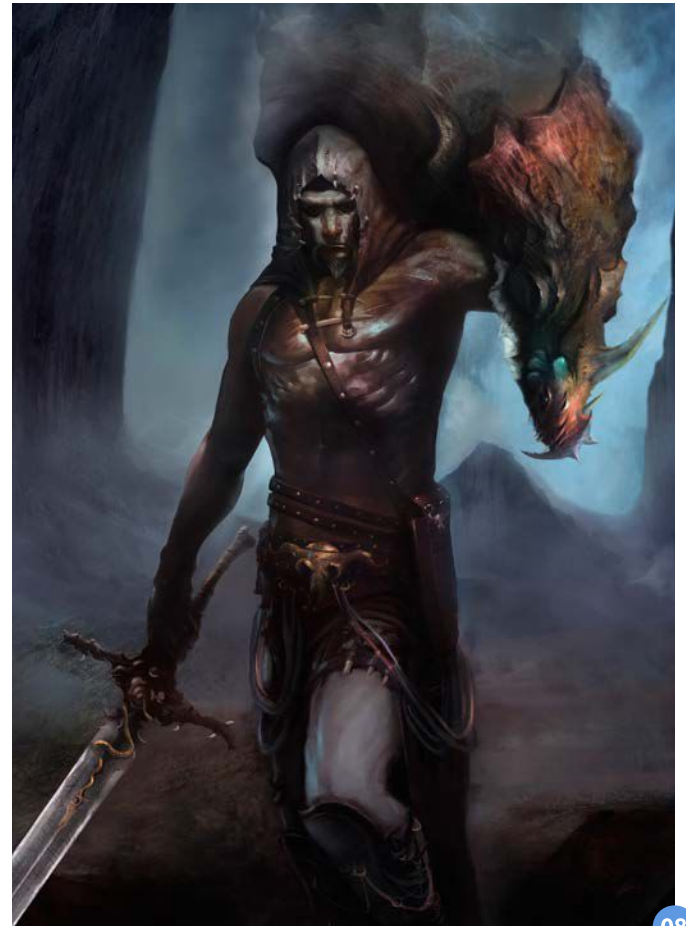


01



02





“It should be understood that not all processes are the same. We can define everything from the very beginning or give free rein to the imagination while we are developing in an improvised way”

clearly see the main muscles have a defined structure, giving us an impression of the kind of heroic character we are trying to create. I begin to give some volume and shape to the creature behind him using the same technique with the gray tones.

04 Home of details: With some imagination I can begin to see where the details will go, and I begin to add shape to the belt buckle and loincloth, adding a hood with fangs to give him a primitive appearance.

It should be understood that not all processes are the same. We can define everything from the very beginning or give free rein to the imagination while we are developing in an improvised way.

This illustration is a character I accomplished freely and spontaneously, meaning that its details were not previously thought out. I only had a very general and vague idea of what was intended.

05 Dragon: We have reached the point where it becomes very evident that the character is a hunter. It is very important that you organize your layers in the software, isolating the illustrated elements to avoid damaging the processes of each detail and element. You can paint all the art in a single layer, but isolating each element is important for custom work as it allows you to alter just that element leaving the rest untouched. I begin to add details to the shape behind the character so it begins to look like a dragon.

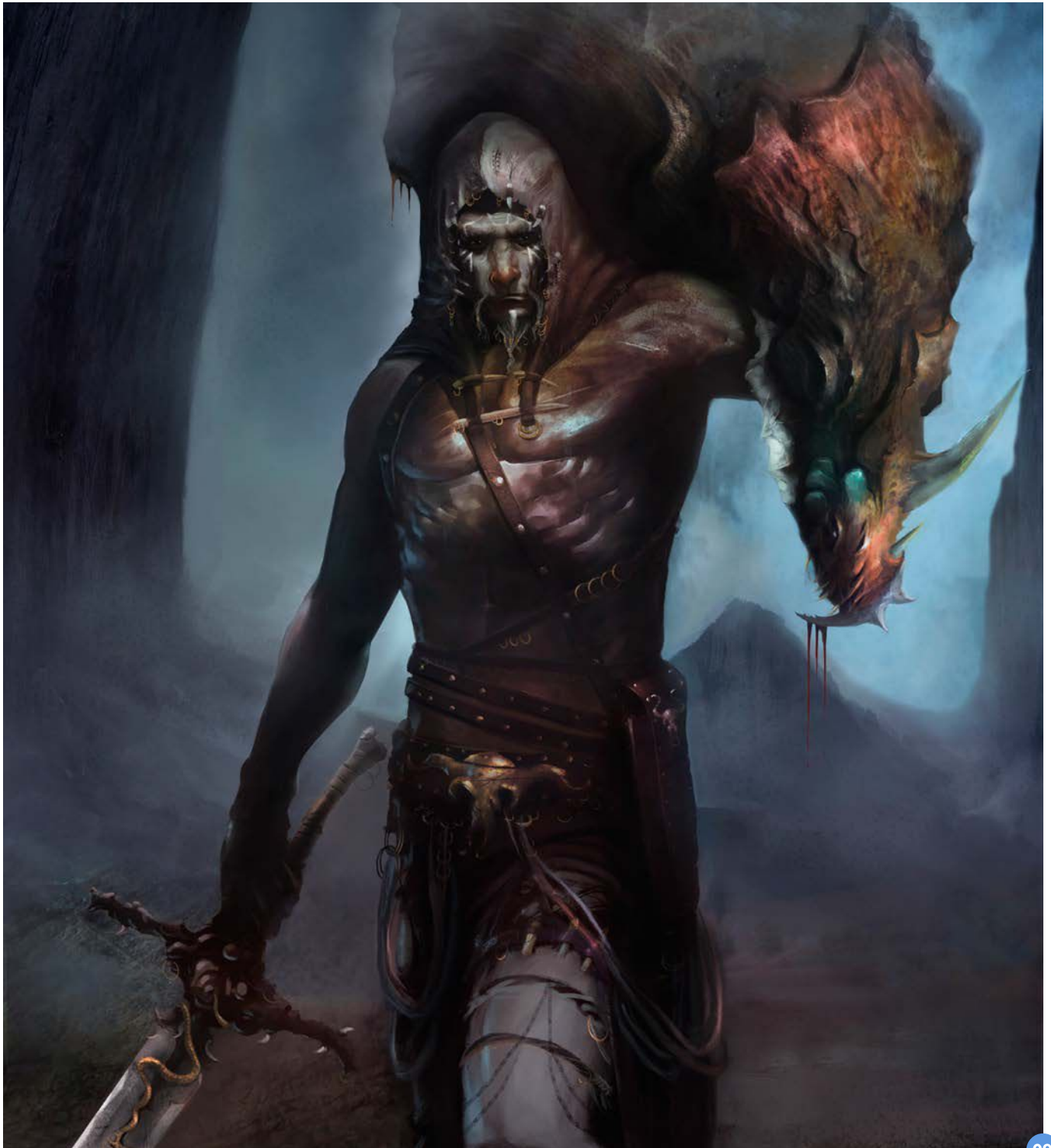
06 Foundations of color: We can easily create an entire illustration with one brush, or we can create new brushes that help us to generate areas of textures that give credibility to the objects. This material is what we want to express, as we already have the volume and details in grayscale. It is time to give more life and color. I do this by painting in a layer above the other layers.

07 Background: After applying color we look for nuances and use an airbrush to paint in the background using broad strokes. The color applied then starts to play an important role in the composition, unifying the creature and character into an environment. We begin to get the effect of head lights bouncing off the

elements – these highlights can be generated by the environment. We are now looking for general light and shadow to give measure and importance to details.

08 Definition background: At this point I begin to define the background by adding details and generating textures with brushes, giving a mountainous, rocky feel. The space is closed and dark with some light in the background mainly to highlight the character. You ►

- 03 Define the volume clearly, detailing the muscle**
- 04 Start to slowly dress the character in ways which reinforce the above characteristics**
- 05 Use separate layers for important elements**
- 06 Detailing and applying color**
- 07 Placing the character in an environment**
- 08 Give detail to the background without stealing the attention from the focal point**



09

have to take into account that the background (or creature) should not have much detail or importance to avoid it stealing attention from the protagonist. The background is simply to place the character in a space and show the world or environment where the Hunter of Dragons lives.

09 Defining the character: At this point I leave the background as I have defined the appearance of the environment. We return to the character and give him some more details to enrich the painting.

Details like tattoos on the face, rings, belts, and earrings define and strengthen the characteristics of the character, giving the idea that he belongs to a culture. We also paint blood on the sword indicating a recent hunt which makes us imagine that this is happening.

At this point I am only missing small details such as dust or dirt particles, minimal elements help to enrich the painting. Rays of light on the outline help highlight the character from the background. Although it may not seem important, it is particles

of light and dust that integrate the character in an atmosphere. Gleams from small creatures flying in the distance visually feed the illustration. In general, I wanted to give a strong sense of light to the face of the character and to the head of the dragon to highlight those parts. With these details you can consider the work complete. ●

09 Enrich the character by adding details



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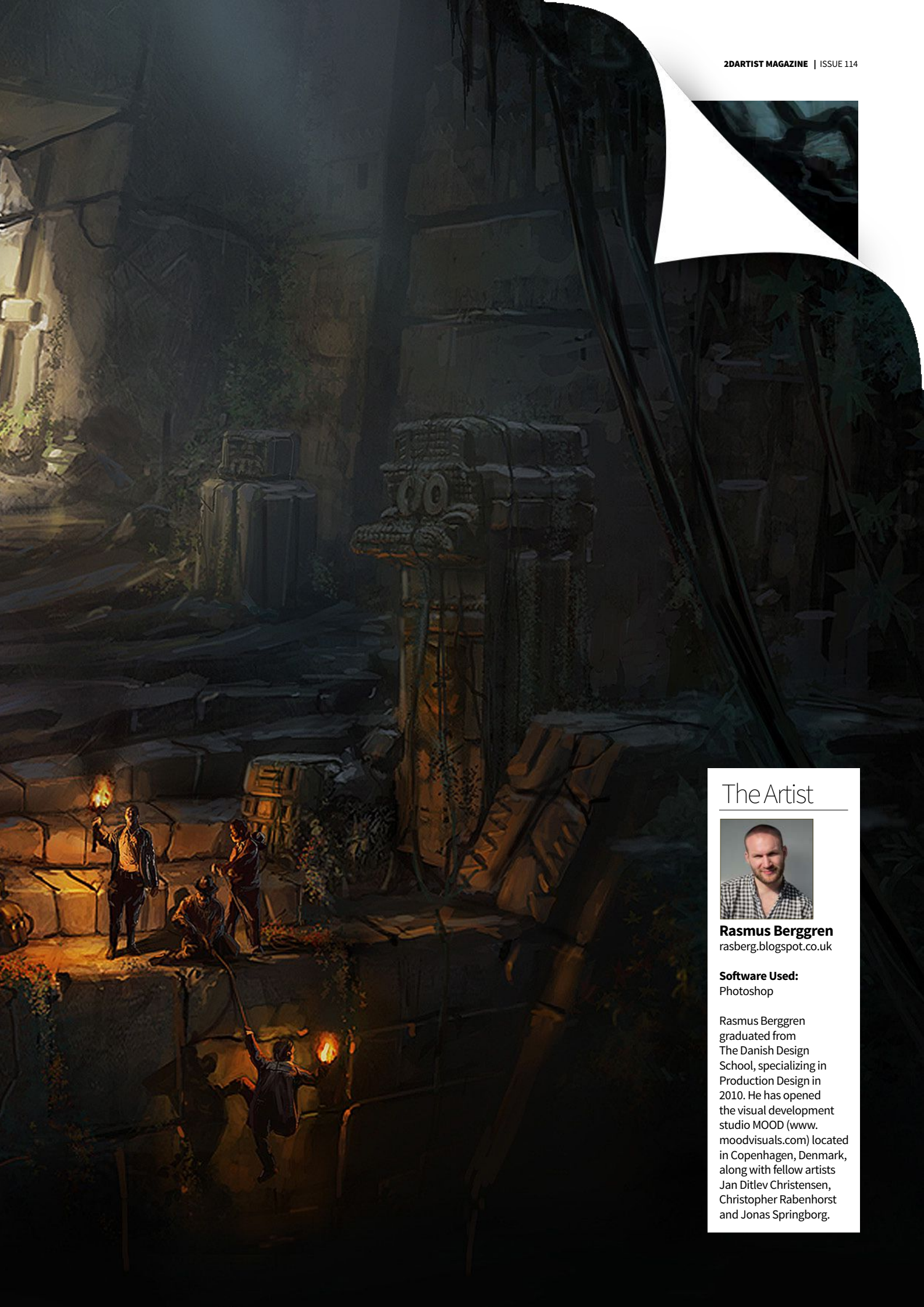
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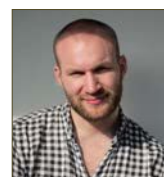
Into the Abyss

by Rasmus Berggren

Discover the techniques Rasmus Berggren used to create atmospheric perspective in his image, *Into the Abyss* with this sneak-peek look inside the pages of *Digital Art Masters: Volume 8* ▶



The Artist



Rasmus Berggren
rasberg.blogspot.co.uk

Software Used:
Photoshop

Rasmus Berggren graduated from The Danish Design School, specializing in Production Design in 2010. He has opened the visual development studio MOOD (www.moodvisuals.com) located in Copenhagen, Denmark, along with fellow artists Jan Ditlev Christensen, Christopher Rabenhorst and Jonas Springborg.

My initial idea began with a rough ink and marker pen sketch on a small 8.5cm piece of paper (Fig.01). I find that the small format works well at this stage as I don't get lost in the details from the beginning and so my creativity is uninhibited.

Composition

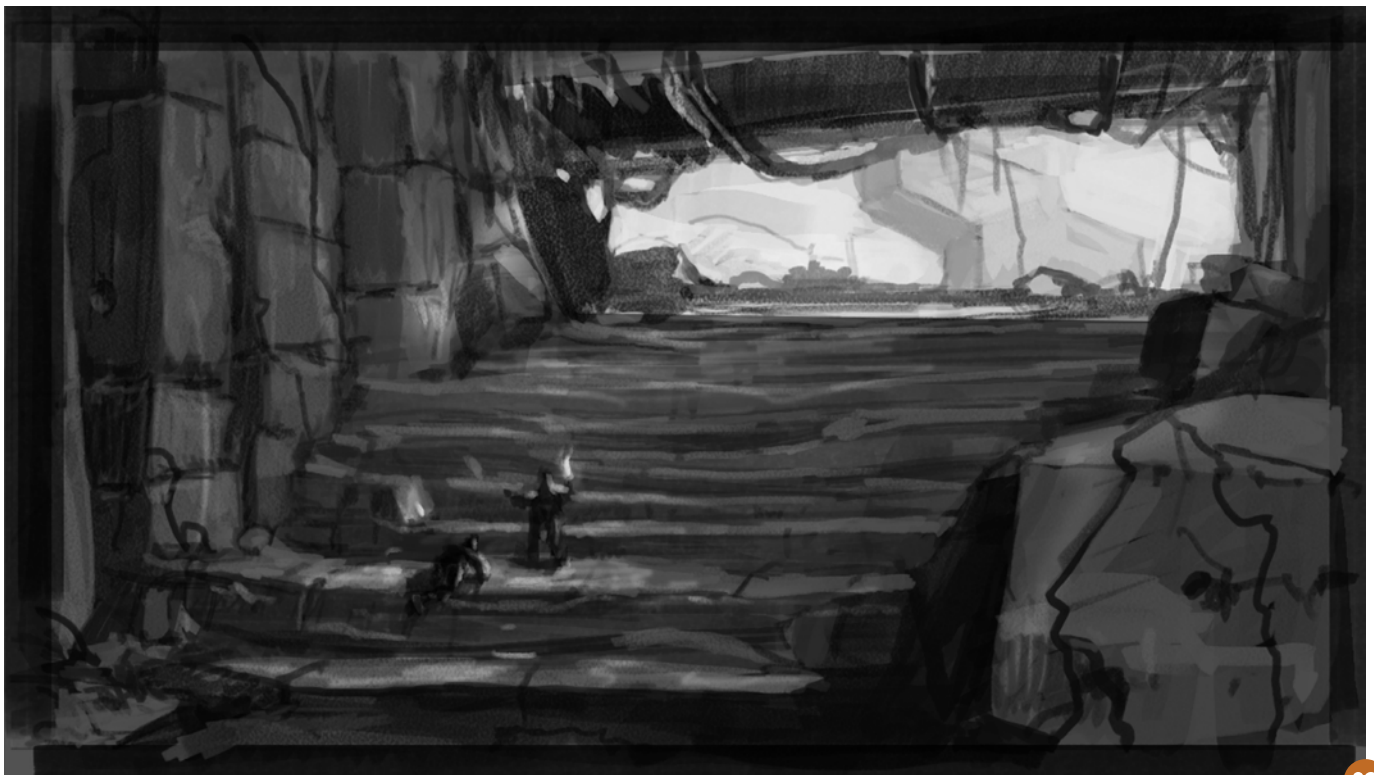
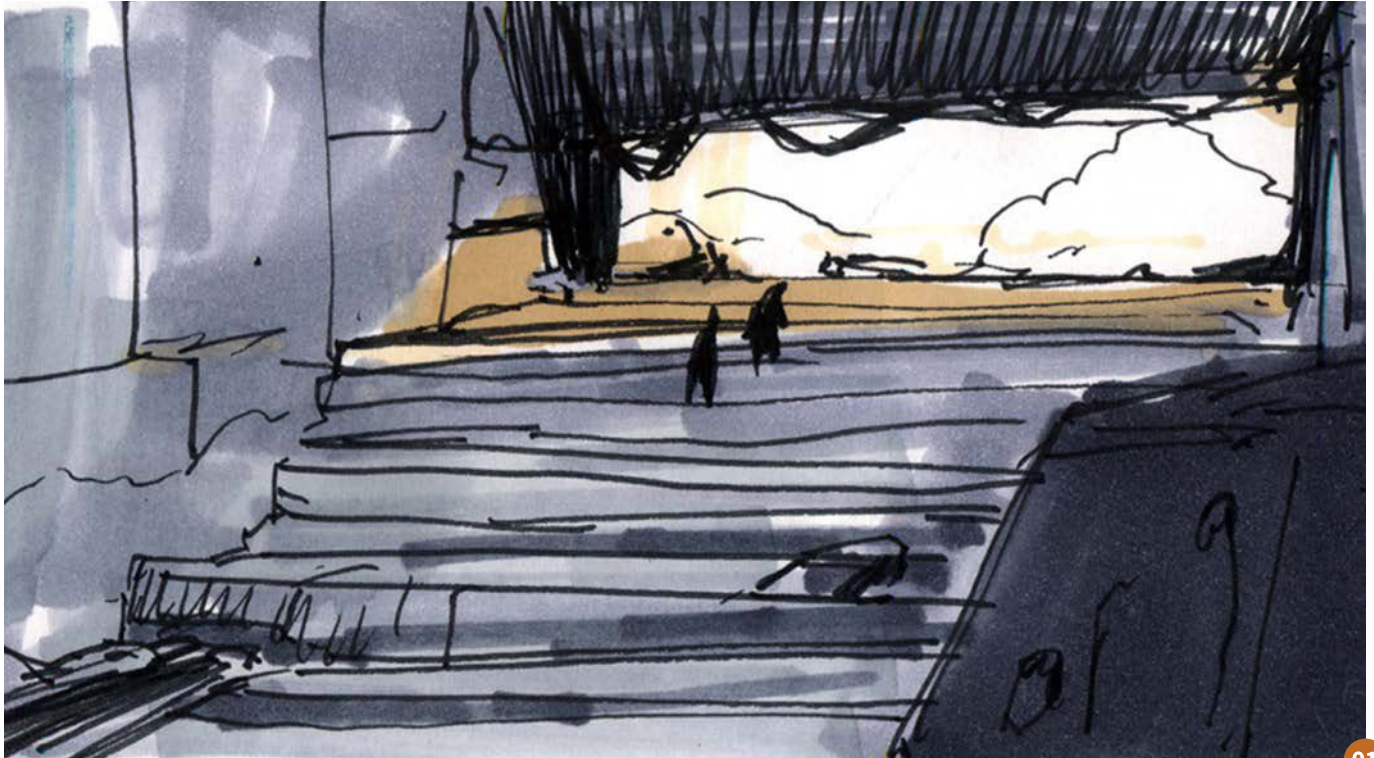
The next step was to import my sketch into Photoshop and start a grayscale image (Fig.02).

I always find grayscale is a good foundation to help with the value of the image, and in this case it highlighted a couple of issues I had with the arrangement in place.

In the first sketch the travelers were moving towards the opening, but I found that in this layout the eye was led directly to the opening and then left the image. I found it much more intriguing to have the travelers descend into the

darkness of the temple. This makes you dwell on the content of the picture and also develops the adventurers' story.

I then started to make adjustments to the composition of the original sketches. When I chose to change the character placement it made sense to flip the canvas as we read from right to left. At this point it's important to have a strong basic composition as a lot of good





03



04

detailing later can't save a poor composition. This rearrangement gave the characters more movement and enhanced the feeling of descending (**Fig.03**).

Color and Perspective

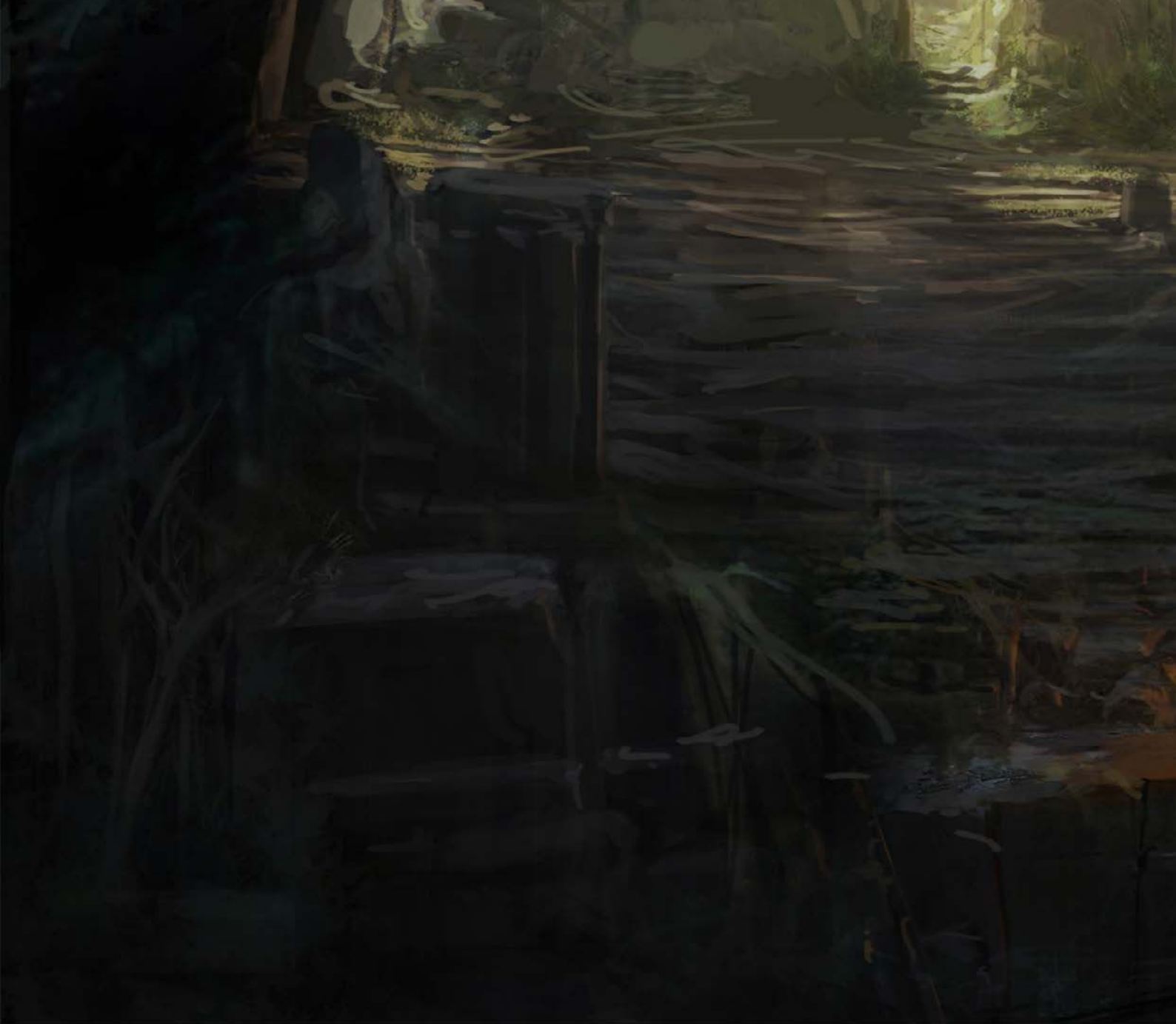
I then began work on the color and perspective. Initially, I made a new layer set to Overlay and used that to paint on top of the grayscale image.

As the Overlay blend mode uses the value of the layer underneath I was able to achieve a good color foundation. I then worked with a basic Chalk brush in Photoshop to block out the colors.

The party of travelers are coming in from the safe world outside and entering a mysterious, dark void, so I wanted a clear definition between the exterior and interior worlds. Because of this, I

found the color palette too monochrome and so began to change the tones and hues.

As you can see in this image, the similarity between the exterior light and the torches inside made the image look a little flat (**Fig.04**). I eventually succeeded in defining a warm exterior and a cool interior, broken up by the warm light from the torches. ►



I also wanted the light from the outside to fall through the opening, so there would be a lot of nuances to use in the bounce lights. At this stage, I also tightened up the perspective as I thought that the temple ought to feel epic and overwhelming, and scaling the characters down helped achieve that feeling.

To help my final color, detail and texture choices, I researched Mayan architecture and looked at images from a trip to Mexico, where I visited ancient temples. It inspired me to make faces and rock formations. It's important to me to indicate location in an image, so I made an effort to show the dense jungle outside, overgrown rocks and hanging roots. I think this helps the viewer get more involved in the illustration (**Fig.05**).

Details

I wanted this piece to feel dense and contain numerous areas of interest. As the viewer's





05

eye will primarily focus on the exterior and the traveling company, I thought it was important to make these areas detailed and interesting.

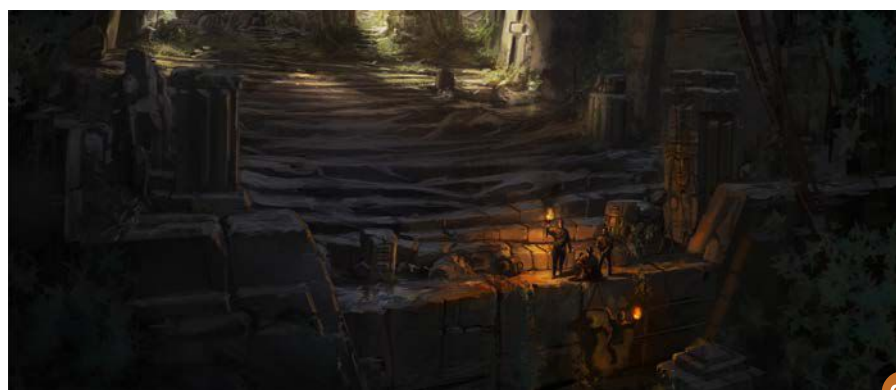
I colored the torch-bearer's shirt with a lighter color as this allows for a greater reflection of light compared to a dark, silhouetted figure (**Fig.06**).

I made the figure descending into the darkness cast a long shadow, which enhanced the atmosphere by making the descent more dramatic and foreboding. It's these small details that create an eerie feeling in the illustration.

Final Adjustment

Atmospheric perspective describes how the appearance and placement of an object is affected by the atmosphere.

I have found that objects usually get lighter and less detailed as the distance from the viewer



07

increases. The objects also seem to blend towards the color of the sky. To imitate this, I lightened the entrance a little and indicated small holes in the ceiling that project light-beams.

To make atmospheric perspective simpler, I sometimes use Photoshop to make a new layer on my image and color-pick the sky. After

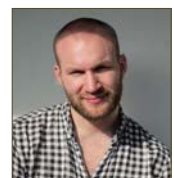
adjusting the opacity of the layer, I then paint over the objects that are furthest away from the viewer. This helps to add that extra level of atmospheric perspective (**Fig.07**).

Comparing the last image to the final piece, it is clear that there is a greater depth and atmosphere evident with these techniques. ●





The Artist



Rasmus Berggren
rasberg.blogspot.co.uk

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